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TARA
A MAHRATTA TALE

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Edited by THEODORE DOUGLAS DUNN, M.A.,
Inspector of Schools, Presidency Division, Bengal.

TIPPU SULTAN.

By MEADOWS TAYLOR,
Abridged and Annotated by HENRY MARTIN,
M.A., Principal, Islamia College, Lahore;
with an Introductory Essay by THEODORE
DOUGLAS DUNN, M.A. Crown 8vo.

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TARA
A MAHRATTA TALE

BY
MEADOWS TAYLOR

ABRIDGED BY
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WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY
BY
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INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS, PRESIDENCY DIVISION, BENGAL.

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PREFACE.

THE 'aim of this series—*The Indian Students' Library*—is to provide convenient editions of the best books written by English authors on India and on Indian subjects. It is hoped that Indian students of the English language will find in these works an adequate representation of the life with which they are familiar. Most teachers of English in India will agree that one of their chief difficulties is the choice of suitable reading material for their pupils. At those stages of instruction that precede University study, and for some time after Matriculation, the aim of the teacher must be linguistic rather than literary. For this reason it is expedient to direct the student to such books as deal with the history, the life, the religion and the customs of his native land. In this way unnecessary and unfair difficulties of subject are avoided; and the mind of the reader is free to engage itself with matters of language, while his interest is comfortably sustained.

From this point of view the individual books of this series have been selected; and in dealing with the original texts the following arrangements have been made:—

- (1) The story has been preserved in the order of its development. The omissions made through exigencies of space do not affect either the sequence of the plot, or the original scheme of the author.
- (2) Whatever has been considered unsuitable for the school or college class-room has been removed. This has affected the

original text very slightly ; as no works, in themselves really unsuitable for the perusal of young readers, have been included in this series.

- (3) For the convenience of the teacher, each chapter has been divided into sections with an appropriate title. Each section is a self-contained unit with an interest of its own, and it should form a useful class lesson in itself.
- (4) There is an introduction to each book giving the essential facts of the author's career and some literary criticism of his work. This has been written mainly for the teacher. The notes have been made as brief as possible, and deal only with the outstanding difficulties of the text.

In the selection of books for a series of this kind, the range of choice is not unlimited. In some cases it is necessary to go outside of India, and to select works that deal with the East in general ; and in other cases it is expedient to introduce memoirs and records of travel that may not have been written by Englishmen. But no work has been selected that does not provide a model of pure and simple English.

It is sometimes forgotten that there is a literature of British India ; and that the history of India for a hundred years after Warren Hastings has something more to show than petty wars and domestic legislation. If this series is successful in reviving interest in a literature that deals primarily with Indian things, and in introducing that literature to the young Indian student, one object of its production will have been suitably achieved.

INTRODUCTION.

Philip Meadows Taylor was born in Liverpool in 1808. At the age of fifteen he was sent to Bombay to enter a business house; but, as his position and prospects had been misrepresented, he welcomed the opportunity of enlisting in the service of the Nizam of Hyderabad. A military commission was obtained for him through the influence of Mr. William Newnham of the Bombay Government. This kindness was never forgotten; and to his friend in 1840 Colonel Taylor dedicated the second of his novels, *Tippu Sultan*.

From 1824, the year of his entering the service of the Nizam, until 1860 when failing health compelled his return to Europe, his duties were both civil and military. Up to the year 1841 his work lay chiefly with the Nizam's army and was relieved by one lengthy visit to England during which he published the "Confessions of a Thug." From 1841 to 1853 he was stationed in the principality of Shorapur. He then took over charge of one of the five Berar districts ceded by the Nizam; and in 1858 he returned to Shorapur as commissioner. At no period was he directly in the employment of the Crown or of the Company. Throughout his whole Indian career he was in the Nizam's service; and this may explain in part his intimacy with and sympathy for all classes of the Indian community. In 1860 he retired to Europe; and in 1876 while returning from India which he had revisited, he died at Mentone in the south of France.

Colonel Taylor's career covers roughly the half century leading up to the Indian Mutiny and the abolition of Company rule. In the light of his experiences of that famous time he looked back upon India's past, and endeavoured to interpret her history to his own people. His service in India began in the year of the first Burmese war, and lasted until Lord Canning's proclamation of peace after the Mutiny.

Most of the important changes of this period took place during the tenure of office of Lords Bentinck, Dalhousie and Canning. Sati had been abolished. Education was not only introduced but generously established. Railways were opened. British armies were successful against the Afghans and the Sikhs, and the Mutiny had been thoroughly quelled. In the employ of the Nizam's government, any prominent part in these great events was denied to Colonel Taylor: but, if he held no distinguished military post in the Mutiny, his influence in preventing the spread of anarchy was of the greatest value. His district of Berar had an important geographical position. His firm control of this area, his influence over the people and the love they bore him, effectually hindered the advance of sedition into the Nizam's dominions.

The events of this time are fully detailed in his autobiography entitled "The story of my life." This is a document of great historical value, throwing light upon the conditions of Indian and Anglo-Indian life in the earlier period of the reign of Queen Victoria. It abounds with references to the outstanding men of that time, and reveals a breadth of view and a capacity for sympathy that are often thoughtlessly denied to the founders of the British Empire in India. Such debatable subjects as education, and the progressive measures of a reformer like Lord Dalhousie, were accepted by Colonel Taylor in the most enlightened spirit of sympathy with the aspirations of the Indian people. In the educational controversy of that time between the supporters of the ancient oriental classics and the advocates of English and the vernaculars as the medium of instruction, he appears to have taken a prominent and decisive part. In his letters to the *Times* he supported the view set forth in the famous minute of Macaulay; and later he wrote, "I have never regretted the part I took in this discussion when I see the noble results which have been already attained, and are rapidly advancing year by year all over India, in all its regions and in all its vernacular languages." Equally interesting are his comments upon the work of Lord

Dalhousie whom he described as "the most practically useful and single-minded ruler that India had ever possessed. His great mind took in every question with a singular clearness and he improved everything he touched. To him India owes electric telegraphs, railways, extension of practical education, large irrigation projects, roads and the removal of many disabilities under which Indians suffered. At no period of Indian history has the administration of India been so admirably conducted." Enough has been quoted to show the attitude of Colonel Taylor to the progressive measures of his time, and to justify, if any justification were needed, the introduction of his literary work to young Indian readers.

His career as a man of letters began early. In 1837, the year of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne, the novel known as "The Confessions of a Thug" was begun. This work was undertaken during the author's convalescence after a severe attack of fever. He says: "I wrote the Confessions to amuse myself, reclining in an easy chair, with a board on my knees, for I was too weak to sit up much—little thinking that they would ever be printed." In 1839, the first edition was published in England and it aroused great curiosity and interest. Queen Victoria herself read the work as it was passing through the press. Colonel Taylor was well qualified to write about the Thugs. In the early days of his service under the Nizam he had begun to investigate their habits; but his military duties demanded his whole attention, and the complete investigation of Thuggee was accomplished by Colonel Sleeman who, by the year 1832, had produced such evidence as roused the whole of India and England to a state of horrified curiosity. Any work on this subject by a writer who had himself been in contact with the Thugs, and knew their habits, was likely to be successful. Colonel Taylor soon found himself in the position of a popular author from whom the reading public demanded further efforts. He writes in the autobiography: "The confessions have been received with much greater interest and success than I had

ever ventured to hope for. It was curious to hear people wondering over the book and discussing it ; and evidently the subject was a new sensation to the public. I was asked also to write another book, which should take the place of an historical novel, and become the forerunner of a series of such Indian works, and Tippu Sultan was chosen as the subject."

This second novel was published in 1840. The series which it foreshadowed was actually completed, but at a much later date, in the leisure of the author's retirement in England. The historical novels in their order were as follows :—

- (1) Tara: this was published in 1863. It describes the development of the power of the Mahrattas and the blow struck by them against the Muhammadans in 1657.
- (2) Ralph Darnell: this was published in 1865. Its subject is the rise of the British power in India and the victory of Plassey 1757.
- (3) Seeta: this was published in 1872. It describes the events of the Mutiny in 1857.

These works illustrate the great modern periods of Indian history at exact intervals of one hundred years. Of the three Tara was the most ambitious, and its success was considerable. This was all the more pleasing to the author as he had kept silence for more than twenty years from the time of his writing the Confessions and Tippu Sultan. One other novel, "A Noble Queen," with Chand Bibi as heroine, was produced in 1875, and in 1877, the year after Colonel Taylor's death, his daughter issued his autobiography. If his many contributions to the *Times* on political subjects be excluded, a brief history of India completes the list of his literary works. This was written in order to provide for the student and the general reader a single narrative of the main events of Indian history in an accessible form. The work was published in 1871 after two years of patient study and research.

The circumstances in which Tara was written are full of interest. Towards the close of the year 1861

Colonel Taylor's leave in England had expired ; but, as his health had failed to improve, he was compelled most reluctantly to resign his service. This was an unexpected hardship for one whose interests were centred in the people of India, a misfortune aggravated by the fact that his mental energy appeared to be seriously impaired. Any attempt to write had the most exhausting effect, and Colonel Taylor was compelled to set aside his many early plans for literary work. Fortunately this condition did not continue long. His physician permitted him to attempt to begin writing ; and, in the experiment then allowed, *Tara* was begun and completed. In this connection the record of the autobiography is full of interesting details. Colonel Taylor writes : " The incidents and actions of the story had been planned for nearly twenty years ; and I knew all the scenes and localities described, as I had the story in my mind during my visit to Bijapur, and had noted the details accurately. My long residence in an entirely Native state, and my intimate acquaintance with the people, their manners, habits and social organisation, gave me opportunities which I think few Englishmen have ever enjoyed, of thoroughly understanding Indian life." The completion of the new novel was hastened by one of the author's friends who said that as the plot was clearly in his mind, he should have it written out chapter by chapter. After six hours' unremitting work, a complete sketch of the whole tale was made, and the details were afterwards filled in. The author then writes : " After this, I felt sure of my object, and wrote confidently, but very slowly, for my brain had not yet regained its full strength ; but the occupation interested me, and was a source of infinite delight." The book was accepted by Blackwood and published in 1863. It was most favourably received. The leading journals were generous in their praise, and the author, as he himself records, was delighted at the warmth of his reception after an absence of more than twenty years from the world of letters. "*Tara*" is the largest and most ambitious of all Colonel Meadows Taylor's works, and upon it his reputation as a novel-

ist must rest. It is strange that a work of such elaborate design and finish should have been, as it were, the plaything of a period of convalescence. "The Confessions of a Thug" was begun after an attack of fever; and "Tara," the most comprehensive novel of Indian life ever written by an Englishman, was planned and completed while the author was recovering from a condition of health that had compelled him to resign his service in India.

The Deccan seems to have had a peculiar fascination for Colonel Meadows Taylor. At the close of his autobiography he stated that, when the story of his life was finished, he hoped to revert to the romantic and mediæval period of Deccan history and to write in illustration of it, a novel the plot of which he had been considering. This work was done in "A Noble Queen" published in 1875, of which Chand Bibi was the heroine. In this, and in "Tara," the illustration of Deccan history long desired by the author has been amply and brilliantly accomplished. The period of "Tara" was that of the middle of the seventeenth century when the Muhammadans of the Deccan weakened by their struggle with the Moguls of Delhi, had become exposed to the attack of the Mahrattas. The historical events described in the novel do not extend over any lengthy period of time. The action of the story is concentrated within the year 1657; when Ali Adil Shah was on the throne of Bijapur; when intrigues between his nobles and the Mogul court had weakened his authority; and when Sivaji had come forward as the acknowledged leader of the Mahratta Confederacy. With these events as a background, the novel provides a comprehensive and detailed picture of contemporary life. As the autobiography shows, Colonel Meadows Taylor had long pondered the theme of "Tara" and the story has every sign of elaborate and careful planning. The action of the tale is developed almost as symmetrically as the plot of a drama, and falls naturally into four main divisions. A brief synopsis of each will show the scope of the novel and the extent of its illustration of the life of the time.

Section I.—The story opens with an intimate description of upper class Hindu life, and introduces Tara, the heroine. The character of her parents, Vyas Shastri and his wife Ananda, are portrayed with sympathy and accuracy. Ananda stands forth as the ideal type of Hindu matron finding her Muhammadan counterpart later in the story. Tara's dedication to the goddess Kali; the entrance of Gunga, the Temple girls, with Moro Trimmul the priest, and the arrival in the Shastri's home of Radha, the second wife whose previous connection with Sivaji had been kept secret by her brother, Moro Trimmul, at once provide the nucleus of romantic interest and plot. The story is essentially one of Hindu life; and, while other contrasted elements are introduced later, the central theme remains undisturbed. Had the author produced nothing more than the series of pictures contained in these first eight chapters, he would have earned his reputation as a sympathetic observer of the domestic and religious ritual of Hinduism.

Section II.—The story now changes abruptly, and the warlike note is struck for the first time. Gopal Singh and Pahar Singh represent the freebooters of the period, secure in their hill fortresses and acknowledging the right of the sword alone. In sharp contrast is the sleek and unscrupulous Lala Tulsi Das. With stolen papers of value he had travelled from the Mogul court and found adventures little to his taste. Captured by Pahar Singh's men he at once became a valuable prize, as the papers he had stolen revealed treason at the court of Ali Adil Shah. Here the author shows great dramatic power and great breadth of outlook upon life. The writer who can describe the scene where Tulsi Das falls into the hands of Gopal Singh and his men-at-arms, and later when he has to face Pahar Singh, the robber chief, captures at a stroke the confident interest of his readers. But these scenes are as yet only

preliminary to the fuller development of the plot in the third division of the novel.

Section III.—Once more the story changes abruptly and introduces upper class Muhammadan life in Bijapur. Fazil, the son of Afzal Khan, and his sister Zaina are idealised types beautifully portrayed. With their step-mother, Lurli Khanum, the counterpart of the Hindu Ananda, they have been made to represent in great accuracy of detail a Muhammadan household of wealth and dignity. So carefully has this been done that the interest of the Hindu family of the Shastri is for the time eclipsed, and the reader moves in a new world of Islamic romance. The whole political life of the time is described. The Wazir of Bijapur represents the secret influence of the Mogul court in Southern India. In this atmosphere of intrigue for the first time in the tale both Hindu and Muhammadan characters are brought together. This has been accomplished with great skill in the famous scene in the temple. Through the capture of Tulsi Das, treasonable papers implicating the Wazir and Sivaji had been discovered by Pahar Singh, the robber chief. The latter, in the disguise of a Yogi, accompanied Tulsi Das to a temple near Bijapur where they were met by the King and his secretary. This meeting was secretly witnessed by Fazil Khan and his Hindu friend Balwant Rao. The whole incident is of the very essence of romance and recalls many a scene in the novels of Sir Walter Scott. Here are grouped the representatives of every faction in the State. Pahar Singh, the independent freebooter, owing no allegiance; Tulsi Das, the trembling and avaricious scribe of the Mogul court; Ali Adil Shah, the chivalrous king of Bijapur; Fazil Khan, the faithful young Mussalman, watching from without and attended by his Hindu retainer, Balwant Rao. The scene ends in a swift mingling of noble and base passions characteristic of the age. Pahar Singh's promise of allegiance to the

young king who faced him boldly, contrasts strangely with his brutal treatment of the miserable Lala whose murder was prevented only by the timely interference of the indignant Fazil Khan. The discovery of the plot leads to the king's public exposure of treason, and to the declaration of war upon Sivaji whose daring spy, Malusre, had been busy in the city, and whose attempt to foster the Mogul power in order to make himself supreme in Bijapur had been discovered in the papers stolen by Tulsi Das. At this stage the various threads of the narrative are skilfully drawn together; and from this point the Hindu and Muhammadan elements of the story are interfused.

Section IV.—The tale now returns to the original theme; and Tara is again shown in the service of the Temple of Tuljapur. The character of Moro Trimmul who combined the functions of priest and political spy, is now more fully developed. He is the real villain of the story. In contrast with violent robbers like Pahar Singh who had at least some nobility of character, he appears in the most sinister light, devoid of truth and honour, false to his faith and a victim of the basest passions. The king's declaration of war upon Sivaji had one terrible result, the sacking of Tuljapur and the desecration of the temple by the troops of Afzal Khan. The scene is one of horror, but only too true in its representation of the life of the time. In the massacre the household of Vyas Shastri is scattered. Tara is carried off by Moro Trimmul and rescued by Fazil, the son of the Muhammadan leader, in whose home she finds refuge. At this stage the contrasted types of Hindu and Muhammadan womanhood are carefully described. There is much here of idealisation; but the description of Zaina, the daughter of Lurli Khanum, in her relations with Tara gives a picture of domestic happiness and peace that contrasts delightfully with the wild and passion-

ate life that surges without the walls of the Khan's residence. At this point for the first time Sivaji comes prominently forward. The declaration of war by Ali Adil Shah found the Mahratta leader acknowledged by the whole confederacy. Malusre, the spy, appears to the assembled Mahrattas and tells of the desecration of the temple of Tuljapur and of the projected Muhammadan invasion. Concerted action at once results, and the host of Afzal Khan is lured into the mountainous Mahratta country. Sivaji's passionate attachment to his mother, and the superstitious awe surrounding his reputation, are cleverly shown. His meeting with the Khan alone at the fortress and his terrible act of treachery have never been better described. The horror and pathos of the scene are heightened by the fact that Afzal Khan has already won the respect and admiration of the reader by his chivalry and skill in war.

The reverse now suffered by the Muhammadans once more throws Tara into the power of Moro Trimmul; and the distracted girl, to save her honour, declares herself Sati. The events of the story now move to a swift conclusion. The family of the Shastri, scattered at the sack of Tuljapur, are reunited, but only in time to discover their beloved daughter's intention. At the last moment when the fatal rites had been prepared and Moro Trimmul awaiting the consummation of his vengeance, Fazil Khan with his men disguised as Mahratta troopers swept down on the crowd and carried off the victim, slaying Moro Trimmul. The marriage of Tara with the young Muhammadan noble follows. This need not be regarded as improbable in the light of the history of the Moguls who were accustomed to take Hindu Rajput wives.

The whole tale has been skilfully wrought, bringing a great variety of characters together, and illustrating

a complex period of Indian history. The method of the author involves adherence to the main facts of history, the truthful presentation of manners and customs, the creation of characters to illustrate fully the life of the time, and the production of certain idealised types setting human nature as it ought to be, rather than as it is. Such idealisation is found in the character of Tara, of Fazil Khan and of Ananda; while a less idealised but undoubtedly more truthful portrait is that of Sivaji. Briefly the method of Colonel Meadows Taylor is that of Sir Walter Scott. The abundance and excellence of the latter's work dominated the whole of the first half of the 19th century when scarcely any novelist could escape his magic influence. When Tara was first planned in 1839, Scott had been only seven years dead. The period was one he would have loved to recreate for his own world, and it is pleasant to think what he could have made of such romantic types as Fazil Khan, Moro Trimmul and Sivaji. Colonel Meadows Taylor might not unfittingly be described as the Scott of Anglo-Indian writers. Apart from his literary method he had the same simple dignity of purpose beautifully expressed in his autobiography when he wrote: "I wanted to bring India nearer to England—to bring its people nearer to our people; and if, by my simple descriptions of eastern life, any have felt more interest in their Indian brothers and sisters, or have been led to read and study more, my object has been attained."

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CHAPTER I.

THE TROUBLES OF VYAS SHASTRI.

i.—*The Pundit of Túljabúr.*

The Puranas relate that the goddess Dúrga, Kalí or Bhavaní, the wife of Siva, once slew a frightful giant named Muhésa; and it was generally believed that this slaying took place at Túljabúr in the Dekhan. Túlja is another name for Bhavaní or Kalí, and so Túljabúr means “the City of Túlja.” It was further believed that the form in which the goddess had appeared was in after years found, changed into stone, in the ravine in which the monster had been slain.

This image still remains where it is said to have been first found. A temple was built over it, and a town gradually gathered round the temple, which became famous throughout India, and is visited by pilgrims from all quarters. The image is now the idol worshipped there, and is a figure of a woman carved in black marble, highly polished, small, but of graceful shape. The eyes are two large uncut rubies; and as the image stands upon its altar in the small dark inner shrine of the temple, they have always a strange, weird appearance, glittering through the gloom, and the smoke of lamps and incense always burning.

The temple is a very picturesque object, situated at the bottom of the deep ravine. Pious worshippers have from time to time enriched it by buildings and courts surrounded with open verandahs, ascending one above the other, and connected with flights of steps. In these courts are several cisterns filled by springs in the sides of the hills; and in these pilgrims to the shrine must bathe before they can worship the image. On festival days the temple is crowded with pilgrims from all parts of India—men and women of various races and types, languages and costumes—bathing,

going up and down the broad flights of steps, pouring into the lower courts in dense crowds, and chanting sacred hymns in different tongues.

The town of Túljabúr surrounds the temple walls, and truly the whole scene is very beautiful—the quaint old town hanging literally on the mountain edge; the deep gloomy ravine of the temple; the precipices and rugged hills to the west and north; and the beautiful undulating plain to the south, with its shining villages and their rich fields and gardens. But the interest centres in the temple itself, with its gilded spires and picturesque buildings.

In the year 1657 there lived in Túljabúr a learned Brahman named Vyas Shastri. In many respects he was a remarkable man, and was greatly respected throughout the country. He was handsome and well built, and in his youth had been famous as a sword-player and wrestler. His face was noble and intellectual, and sometimes wore a haughty look; but generally its expression was good humoured, and always elevated and purified by intellectual pursuits.

He was a profound Sanskrit scholar; and in law, grammar, and logic, with the deep philosophy of the Vedas and their commentators, he had few superiors. He was also learned in mathematics and astronomy; and could calculate eclipses and the position of the planets. As a devout Brahman he had made pilgrimages, and had gained renown in theological discussions at Benares, Nuddea in Bengal, and Gya, as well as at Madura and Conjevaram in the south of India.

Moreover the Shastri was a man of wealth. He had, at his father's death, inherited considerable property. He drew a large income from the temple service, and from the offerings made to him as head of the establishment. He farmed some land, too, near the town, and had an excellent garden near a village in the plain below the hills, and made a good profit on the daily supply of vegetables to the town. Finally, as one of the most learned Sanskrit scholars of the Dekhan, he was famous as a teacher, and his classes were attended by young Brahmans from all parts of the

country, who paid fees according to their means. A great deal of all these riches he shared liberally with the poor, for he was noted for his charity.

2.—*Tara, the Widow.*

Yet with all his wealth, and learning and honour, Vyas Shastri had two great cares which pressed upon him heavily. The first was that he had no son; the second, that his beautiful daughter, Tara, was already a virgin widow. And these were heavy griefs. His wife, Ananda Bai, had borne him two sons and a daughter, of whom Tara was the first-born. The others had followed, and had died in childhood. In vain had the parents made pilgrimages to the shrines in the Dekhan after the death of the last son, and to Benares also, to pray to Siva in his holiest of temples, and had from time to time sent gifts to the shrine—no further offspring followed.

Often had Ananda urged him to marry again, and assured him of her love and protection to a young wife. Why should he not marry? He was yet comparatively young: men older than himself had married twice, nay thrice, or till the object of their desire was accomplished. So urged his wife and his best friends.

“If you had a son,” she would say to her husband, “he would be a young man before you were old. Even if you died, the property would descend to him, and the ceremonies would be properly performed. If you grew old, and I were with you, he would take care of us and of Tara. Who will do this now?”

Yes, the echo in his heart was sad enough. Who would do so? There might be two widows, perhaps, mother and daughter, both left to the mercies of distant relatives who had no personal knowledge of them, and to whom they would be as ordinary widows only, no matter what amount of property they had brought with them—shaven, dressed in the coarsest and scantiest raiment, and used for menial offices. Yes! the echo—“who would do so?”—often as the words were said, fell heavily on the Shastri's heart; and recently he had told his wife that—“he would

think about it if his life were spared for another year." And so Ananda, without making any formal proposals, was collecting information as to the appearance, character, property, and accomplishments of many girls in the neighbourhood.

Most heavily, however, of all domestic cares did the situation of his daughter oppress the Shastri. She was growing very beautiful. So kind, too, so loving, so thoughtful, so unselfish, so clever a scholar! She might have been a happy wife—before this, perhaps, a happy mother—yet at sixteen she was a widow, with a gloomy future.

She had been married when she was little more than six years old, to the son of one of the chief priests of the temple of Pandarpur. The family was rich, and the young man gave promise of learning and of character. No matter now; he was dead. Three years after the marriage he had been cut off suddenly by a fever, to the grief of his family and to the extinction of the Shastri's hopes for his daughter. Since then, Tara had betaken herself to the study of the holy books in which her father delighted; and, doomed as it were to an unmarried life, had vowed it to the performance of religious exercises after the manner of her faith.

It was unusual in those days for Brahman girls to be taught to read and write even; and when the Shastri began to teach her the mysteries of Sanskrit learning, even his friends disapproved, while his enemies loudly condemned his act. But what still more angered the Pundits was the fact that Tara still wore ordinary clothes and that her head as yet had not been shaved. The degradation of Brahman widowhood had not yet been put upon her; and she was too beautiful to escape notice, or envious comment. The rites of widowhood must be performed some time. Her father and mother both knew that. They would have to take her to Pandarpur, or to Benares, or to Nassuk, or some other holy city, and go through the ceremonies of purification. Then all her beautiful hair would be cut off and burned, and she would ever after have to be wrapped in a coarse white cotton or woollen sheet.

Ah ! it seemed cruel to disfigure that sweet face, which they had looked upon since she was a child, and had watched in all its growing beauty ! Any other less pure, less powerful parents, would long ago have been obliged to obey those cruel customs ; and were they not performed every day at the temple itself ? “ Why should the rite be delayed ? ” said many ; “ the girl is too handsome ; she will be a scandal to the caste. The excuses of going to Benares, or to Nassuk, are mere devices to gain time, and sinful. The Shastri must be publicly urged and warned to remove the scandal from his house and from the sect.”

Her father and mother observed when gloomy thoughts beset her, and did their best to cheer them away. “ She might yet be happy in doing charitable acts,” they said, “ in reading holy books, in meditation, in pilgrimages ; and they would go with her to Benares and live there.” “ Why not,” the Shastri would say ; “ why not, daughter ? We have but you, and you have only us ; it will be good to live and die in the holy city.”

But her parents did not go, and the rites were put off indefinitely. Last year they were to have gone to Nassuk for the purpose to their relatives ; but the planets were not favourable, or the business of the temple and its ceremonies interfered. This year, when the cold season was nearly over, in the spring, at the Basant festival, “ they would see about it.”

So here were the two great cares of the household. Which was the heavier ? To the Shastri, certainly, Tara’s ceremony of widowhood. His own marriage was a thing which concerned himself only, and, at the worst, he could adopt an heir ; but that Tara should be a reproach to him, the revered Shastri and priest, and remain a reproach among women—it could not be. The caste were becoming urgent, and the Gúrú, or spiritual prince, whose agents travelled about enforcing discipline and reporting moral and ceremonial transgressions. sent him word, privately and kindly, that the matter should not be delayed. He quite approved of the ceremony being performed at Benares or at Nassuk,

out of sight, for the old man knew Tara—knew her sad history, and admired her learning and perseverance in study. At his last visit, two years before, he had put up in the Shastri's house, and had treated the girl as his daughter ; but the requirements of the caste were absolute, and even if she had been his own daughter he dared not to have hesitated.

CHAPTER II.

TARA SOLVES THE PROBLEM.

I.—“*The Mother's*” *Call*.

“Tara, O Tara! where are you?”

“Mother, I am here. Is it time?”

“Yes; we should go with the offerings to the temple. Come, your father has long been gone, and it will be broad day before we can reach it. Come,” said her mother, entering a small open verandah which skirted the inner court of the house, where the girl sat reading by the light of a lamp, now paling before the dawn which was fast spreading over the sky.

She shut her book with a reverential gesture, laid it aside in its quilted cover, and stood up. How beautiful she was as she stood there in her dark blue silk *saree*, her head raised and turned to meet her mother's entrance, and her sweet, gentle face still thoughtful from her religious meditations! No wonder that as each morning she left the house with her mother to pay her devotions at the temple, and passed along the streets with downcast eyes, her graceful figure attracted more and more attention every day. Many a good wish followed her, and many a benediction from the aged poor of the town, who had often been blessed by her charities.

“Come, daughter,” said Ananda, “cast that sheet about your head. It strikes me that men look at you too earnestly now as we pass the bazaar.”

“Nay, dear mother, not so. Am I a Turki woman to veil my face?” said Tara, quickly. “Am I ashamed of it? Are you, mother?”

“If you were not so beautiful, Tara. I dread men's evil eyes on you, my child, and I dread men's tongues more.”

“Ah, mother! I dread neither,” replied the girl

"They have done me no harm as yet, and if my heart is pure and *sati* before God and the Holy Mother, she will protect me. She has told me so often, and I believe it. Come—I think—I think," she added, with an excited manner, as she clasped her heavy gold belt about her waist, her eyes glowing strangely, "I think, mother, the goddess came to me last night in my dream. She was very beautiful, O, very beautiful! She took hold of my hair, and said, 'Serve me, Tara, I will keep it for you.'"

"Tara! are you dreaming still?" exclaimed Ananda. "Holy Mother! what light is in your eyes? Put the thought far from you, O dearest: it is but the echo of what your father said last night when he comforted us both—it will pass away."

"Perhaps so, mother," answered the girl, abstractedly. "Yet it seemed so real, I think I feel the touch on my hair still. I looked at it when I rose, and combed it out, but I saw nothing. Yes, it will pass away—everything passes away."

"And what was she like, Tara?" asked her mother, unable to repress her curiosity.

"O mother, I was almost too dazzled to see. I am even now dazzled, and if I shut my eyes the vision is there. There!" cried the girl, closing her eyes and pointing forward, "there, I can see it now! The features are the same; she is small, shining like silver, and her eyes glowing, but not with red fire like those in the temple. O mother, she is gone!" she continued, after a pause, "she is gone, and I cannot describe her."

"Did you tell this to him—to your father, Tara?" asked her mother, much excited.

"Yes, mother. I awoke before him and could not sleep again. I got up and drew water for him to bathe. I tended the fire, and sat down to read. Then he went and bathed; and when he had come out of the temple and put on dry clothes, I read part of the 'Gita' to him, but I was trembling, and he thought I was cold. Gradually I told him——"

"And what said he, daughter?" asked her mother interrupting her.

“He seemed troubled, mother, and yet glad, I could not say which. He said he would ask ‘the Mother’ after the morning hymn was ended.”

“Come then, Tara, we will go to him at once. Nay, girl, come as you are; your words have given me strength, my pearl; come.”

So saying she led the way out of the house, and they passed down the narrow street on the way to the temple.

That morning Vyas Shastri had risen unrefreshed—his sleep had been restless. Something in one of the books he had been explaining to Tara in the evening had brought up the subject of widowhood, and the message of his Gúrú, or spiritual leader, had been discussed with much grief and misery to all. There seemed to be no evasion of them possible—the rites must be fulfilled; and he had again spoken of Benares, and Tara had simply and meekly given herself into his hands, and bowed before him and her mother in submission. She was no doubt excited; and her first words in the morning startled him exceedingly.

The Shastri knew of many women on whom the spirit of the goddess had descended. They were possessed by her: they spoke and prophesied when they were full of her presence: and he dreaded them, while he worshipped the power displayed. As Tara told him her dream, and the service the goddess had asked, could it be real? Could his daughter, as an inspired priestess, ever speak before the image? That, however, must be tried without delay, and he hastened more rapidly than usual to the temple, having told her to follow when her mother was ready.

He arrived as the ceremonies of bathing and dressing the image were being performed by the inferior priesthood. When these were finished, the morning service began. We need not describe it—the decking of the altar with flowers, the marking the forehead of the image with the sacred colours, the offerings of daily food and sacred elements with flowers, and the singing of mystic hymns. Vyas Shastri was speedily joined by other Brahmans and priests, who bareheaded,

naked to the waist, and carrying the sacred fire and sacrificial offerings, chanted hymns with the accompaniment of clashing cymbals and lutes. Thus the procession was passing round and round the temple, and the simple but strange melody rising and falling amidst the buildings, trees, and cliffs, and filling the ravine with sound, as Tara and her mother reached the outer gate, and began to descend the steps which led to the lower court.

Ordinarily they did not bathe in the sacred cistern where, from the carved stone cow's mouth, the stream of the holy spring gushed sparkling into the basin; but Tara paused as they passed it. She had felt more and more excited as she neared the temple, and the melody of the hymn and the clashing of the cymbals, as they came up together through the trees in the still air, had added to the effect already produced in her mind by her dream.

"Mother," she said, hesitatingly—"mother, ought I not to bathe here? Can I go into the presence, even with these garments on me, after what the Holy Mother said last night? They should be wet and pure."

"It is too cold for you, my child," replied Ananda. "Come, Tara, come on; the hymn will be finished before we can join—come."

"No, mother, I am hot—burning; something urges me to the well, and I cannot resist it. Mother, I must be pure before the shrine. May I go?"

"The spirit of the goddess is with her, truly," thought her mother. "Go, Tara, it may refresh you," she said; "and there are dry clothes in the temple. Go, be quick, my child!"

The girl descended the steps into the basin, and, turning to the east, poured libations from her hands to the four quarters of the earth; then the three libations to the sun, saying a short hymn from the Veda. Then followed her prayer to the goddess: "Holy Mother, do what thou wilt with me; take me, leave me, or use me as thou wilt, but do not cast me away! Behold, I come!" Then she stepped forth from the basin.

"I am ready now," she said, simply; "come, mother, I will go to her pure, and sit before her. If she wants Tara she will speak. Come!"

Her mother noticed her glistening eye and glowing cheek, and seeing the expression of her face was changed from its habitual sadness to one of excited triumph, she became excited herself, and seized Tara by the hand. "Come," she cried, "Victory to Kali!" And so they descended the steps more rapidly, while the music of the hymn and the clash of the deep-toned cymbals resounded through the lower court, and seemed to be echoed and repeated in the cliffs and buildings above and around them.

2.—*Tara's Answer.*

The procession of Brahmans and priests was turning the corner of the temple as Tara and her mother met it in the full swell of the music. Usually the girl and her mother fell in behind, reverentially and calmly, and followed it as it passed round. Now, however, the Shastri and his companions were amazed to see Tara separate herself from her mother, and put herself at the head of the party, toss her arms into the air, and join in the hymn they were singing—leading them on more rapidly than they had moved before. The Shastri noticed that she had bathed, and that her wet garments dripped as she went along. "She is pure," he thought; "she has prepared herself and if the goddess will take her, it is her will. There is something in this that cannot be stayed."

The other Brahmans stopped, still chanting, and looked to Vyas Shastri with wonder for some explanation, which was as quickly given. "The goddess spoke to her last night, and will not be refused," he said. "Go on, do not stop her; let her do as she wills."

No one dared stop or touch Tara. The height of excitement, or, as they thought, inspiration, was in her eye, and that sweet face was lifted up with a holy rapture. She seemed to fly rather than to walk, so completely had her feelings carried her forward; and as she moved she looked behind to those following, still

chanting with them, her arms waved above her head, and beckoning them onwards. They could not resist the influence. So they passed on, round and round the temple, still singing. Other morning worshippers, attracted by the strange sight, joined them, or stood by wondering till the hymn was finished. Then Tara, noticing no one, entered the porch of the temple rapidly, and advancing alone, knelt down before the door of the inner shrine in front of the image, and they watched her silently.

What did she see to cause that earnest look? The image was familiar to all. The light of the lamps within shone out strongly on the kneeling figure, shrouded in its wet clinging drapery, but hardly lit up the gloomy space in the deep outer porch, around which the spectators arranged themselves reverentially. The ruby eyes of the goddess glittered with a weird brilliance from among the cloud of incense burning before her; and the fragrant smoke, issuing from the door, wreathed itself about her form and ascended to the roof, and hung about the pillars of the room.

Those looking on almost expected the image would move, or speak, and the silence was becoming almost oppressive when the girl's lips moved: "Mother," she cried, in her low musical voice—"Mother! O Holy Mother! Tara is here before thee. What wouldst thou of her?" And she leant forward, swinging her body to and fro restlessly, and stretching forth her hands. "Mother, take me or leave me, but do not cast me away!" She could only repeat this simple prayer, for the yearning at her heart could find no other words; but her bosom heaved, and her hands and arms, with her whole frame, trembled violently.

"Mother, dost thou hear? I will do thy bidding," again murmured the girl. "Come, come! as thou wast in my dream. So come to Tara! Ah, yes, she comes to me! Yes, Holy Mother, I am with thee;" and stretching forth her arms, she sank down on her face.

"Let us chant the hymn to the praise of Durga," said an old Pundit; and, striking a few chords on the instrument he held in his hand, the hymn was

begun. The sound filled the vaulted chamber, and was taken up by those outside, who crowded the entrance. Still she moved not, but lay tranquilly; the full chorus of the men's voices and the clashing of the cymbals were not apparently heeded by her. As it died away, there was a faint movement of the arms, and gradually she raised herself to her knees, tossed back the hair from her face and neck, which fell over her shoulders and back, and looked around her wildly for a moment. Then, she bowed herself again before the image, while the brilliant ruby eyes seemed, to those who beheld them, to glow still more brightly through the smoke of the incense.

"Holy Mother of the gods," she said, in a low voice of prayer, "I am thy slave. I fear thee no longer. Blessed Mother, I will love thee, who art kind to Tara. . . . Here will I live and die with thee according to thy word." Then she arose and continued to him: "Come, father; behold, I am calm now."

"She is accepted, brethren," said the old priest, turning to the others; "let us do her honour. With no life for the world, let her widowhood remain in the Mother's keeping. She has chosen her, let no man gainsay it."

"Victory to Túlja!" was shouted by the attendant priests and worshippers. "Victory to the Holy Mother!" "Victory to her priestess!" "Let us take her in procession!" "Let us go with her!" cried all around.

"Ah, no, friends," said the girl, rising modestly; "I am but a poor helpless child who was in grief, and whom the Mother has comforted. Leave me! let me go! I would go home. Mother, take me away! Father, come with me!"

"It may not be, daughter," said the old priest, kindly; "we must neglect nothing, or it will be dangerous for you and for us. Bring a palki," he shouted to the attendant priests, "and get the music ready, and flowers too, and offerings. Come, let us not delay."

Tara yielded: she bent reverently before the old

priest, and touched his feet, then her father's, and going round the Brahmans assembled she did the same; last of all her mother's, who was sobbing, yet not in sorrow. "Come," she said, "I am ready; do with me as you wish. You are my elders, and I obey."

So they led Tara forth and placed her in the open palankin, and, as they decked her with flowers, and strewed garlands over its canopy, the temple music struck up a joyous marriage measure. Then, as the bearers moved gently forward, her father and mother holding the sides of the litter, the priests arranged themselves on all sides of it, and began another solemn chant of victory to the goddess.

By this time news of what had happened had passed on into the town, and as the procession came out of the temple gate and entered the broad street which led to the centre of the town, a large and excited crowd greeted it with shouts of "Victory to Túlja!" "Victory to Káli!" Men and women thronged from street and alley and joined the procession as it moved up; others stood upon the terraces of their houses and waved garments or handkerchiefs. And as Tara passed on through the bazaars, seated calmly in the palankin, flowers were cast on her, incense was burned before her, and fragrant powder thrown over her, with blessings. So they passed on, through the eastern gate of the town, over the level space which led to a small temple perched on the edge of a steep slope on the south of the town. This was the ancient temple called Pápnás, or "the sin-destroyer"—which encloses the sacred spring where, according to the legend, the goddess Túlja bathed after slaying the monster. There Tara had to go through purifying ceremonies, and bathe in the sin-cleansing basin.

At last all the proper rites had been performed, and Tara's new life had begun. The excitement which had possessed her, was already passing away, leaving her weary and exhausted. The procession was, therefore, quickly reformed, and Tara was brought back to her father's house. When the palankin was set down, she could hardly step out of it; and when, supported by

her mother and the servants, she reached the inner room, she sank helplessly in her mother's arms. But she was now in gentle, careful hands, and at rest.

"She will need careful tending for a long time, brother," said the old priest to her father. "Put her into dry clothes and let her rest quietly. It is possible she may not even speak for many days: for so I have known it."

'I am thankful to you all, friends and brethren," said the Shastri, much moved, as the old priest and the Brahmans left him.

So the beautiful daughter of Vyas Shastri had become a Múli or priestess of the temple, and the goddess herself had called her from the disgrace of widowhood to the glory of her own service. Was not this better than worldly ties? Now she was free!

Was Tara satisfied? If the dread of her shame had been removed, the void in her heart had not as yet been filled; but the new life had to begin, and she would do her best, and so she comforted herself.

CHAPTER III.

VVAS SHASTRI TAKES A SECOND WIFE.

I.—A *pilot*.

There was one man who had gazed at Tara in the temple and the procession with peculiar interest. Being a Brahman, he had marched close to the palanquin bareheaded and unnoticed, singing the hymns as one of the attendant priests. Moro Trimmul, for that was his name, had watched Tara for months past as she daily attended the temple worship with her mother; but the strange scene that morning had given a new turn to his cunning thoughts. When the ceremonies at the Páp-nás temple were finished, he fell out of the procession, and, watching it depart, sat down alone on the edge of the cliff looking over the plain. A girl's voice aroused him from his reverie.

"So, Moro Trimmul is not dancing back to the town as he came out," she said ironically.

He looked up to see one of the Múrlis or priestesses of the great temple standing beside him.

"Neither are you, Gunga. Do you not welcome a new priestess?"

"Would I dance before her?" she answered with a sneer. "When she dances with us before the Mother, then she will be a true Múrli—not otherwise. Now I hate her; I shall always hate her."

"Ah! she will never join you," he said; "she is quite different from the rest of you."

"She shall not remain so, Moro Trimmul," the girl cried, fiercely. "If she has chosen to serve the Mother she must obey her rules, and be one of us!"

The Brahman did not answer, but seemed to be lost in thought.

Gunga looked at him and sighed. "I thought so,"

she said, bitterly. "You have seen a new face, and you will love me no more!"

"Love you!" answered the man. "All your love is gold. Listen, Gunga: get her into my power, and I will give you a golden waist-belt."

"As heavy as hers?" she cried, excitedly. "Yes, as heavy as hers."

"Swear to give me this," she cried, "and I will do your will—to humble her pride and her father's. He drove me from the temple one day, and I have hated him ever since."

"I swear," said the man. "Come and sit here by me." She did so, but neither spoke for some time.

"You have a sister. Moro Pundit, and she is beautiful. She ought to have been married before this. A little more time, and can it be done?" she said, breaking the silence.

The Brahman winced. "She was betrothed once," he said, "but the man died."

"Perhaps she was married," continued the girl, with a sneer, "and she is as Tara Bai or worse. Is it not so?"

"No! by the Holy Mother, no!" cried the Pundit, sharply, and with flashing eyes. "Breathe such a thing and I will have your life. Beware what you say, even to me! A word more, and I fling you down the precipice!"

"O, I fear not for my life," said the girl, carelessly; "the Mother takes care of that. But I will say nothing, lest I should lose my pretty gold belt. But what of your sister? The Shastri wants a new wife, we hear; Ananda Bai wants a son to cheer her and him, and why should not your sister be taken there? She is of a good age—why not? Could she understand what to do? Could she be taught?"

"Ah!" said the Pundit, "I had thought of it too, but it seemed impossible. I do not know him—yes—if——"

"If?—why if? Are you afraid? The girl is here—let me see her and know her, and leave the rest to us."

"Gunga," said the Brahman, after a pause. "If you can bring this about—if you can get me speech of this Shastri——"

"Let me speak to the girl first. 'Radha,' that is her name, is it not? Let me see if she is resolute, as I hear of her. If she be, she shall have her desire; you shall have yours; and I—ah, yes! I will have more gold. Yes," she cried, clapping her hands again, "more gold! I will have gold anklets, like Tara's. Why should she wear gold anklets and mine be only silver? Will you give them?"

"When my sister is Vyas Shastri's wife you may have what you will, Gunga. I swear it to you. Are you content? Yes, you shall see her now. Manage the matter as you will; women's wits are sharper than mine."

"Once more, Moro Pundit," continued Gunga, "tell me have you any women with you—any relations?"

"Yes, her mother's sister—a widow; no more. Our mother is dead, my father is dead, and there are only ourselves left of a large family."

"Then the Shastri will like the connection all the better, and—you are rich, they say. Yes, I will bring the widow and Ananda together."

"We have enough. In that respect I can satisfy the Shastri fully."

"Ah! he will ask no questions. His wife is shrewd and clever, and will guide him." The girl laughed heartily. "Now go by that path; we must not be seen together. I will come to you before noon; we have no time to lose. Only remember your oath, Moro Trimmul, and beware how you try to deceive me."

"I am in your hands, Gunga, and may be trusted," he replied; "nay, more, there may be better days for you yet, girl——"

"No—no more. No more like the old ones," she said, shaking her head mournfully. "Only the gold now—only the gold!"

2.—*Moro Trimmul.*

Moro Trimmul was the son of a *Josi*, or astrologer.

of Wai. His father had died some years before, and his mother not long after him. When he found himself thus left the head of the household, he had given the charge of his little sister, Radha, to his aunt, Sukya Bai, and had given himself up to the company of certain wild friends of his, with whom he had become a great favourite. The leader of these was the Rajah Sivaji, whose raids against the Moghuls and Muhammadans in general had long since made him a hero among the Mahrattas.

Sivaji's companions were the young Mahratta gentry and farmers, and the young Brahmans who were willing to join him, as priests, or soldiers, or both, in his wild enterprises. Moro Trimmul was one of these, and one whom he trusted as a very true friend. So long as Moro's father lived, he had in some degree restrained his son; but his private meetings with his prince were frequent; and in the plays of which Sivaji was so fond, Moro was generally an actor and reciter. Thus it was that Sivaji came often to Wai, and stayed in the Josi's house; and so he came to know Radha, then only a beautiful child, but already betrothed. He was a Mahratta, and she a Brahman, and any union between them was impossible; yet she grew to be more interesting to him as she grew older.

At last Radha's betrothed husband died. Other offers were made for her, but they were always refused; so that people believed the story set afoot by her brother and Sukya Bai that she was to be married to a distant relation who, now absent on pilgrimages, would return and claim her. And so the girl grew, the time for marriage passed, and the visits of the Rajah were encouraged by aunt and nephew in the hope that he would take her.

But Sivaji now feeling his way to power, saw that such a marriage might spoil his career. And, though he still clung closely to Moro Trimmul as a friend, he gradually avoided the house, and his visits became less and less frequent. Radha, however, looked upon him as a hero and had fallen in love with him; and being a spoilt and wilful girl, had been caught more than

once by her aunt and brother in an attempt to escape to him. Sivaji had therefore spoken plainly to his friends. "For my sake," he said, "if not for yours and hers, keep her safe. Take her away and have her married; the farther away from here the better. I know what is in your heart; but it cannot be."

So a plan was quickly arranged between them. Moro Trimmul knew many of the Mahratta gentry of the Dekhan, and he was sent to gain their support for Sivaji's cause. This meant journeys from place to place. He was well provided with money and he travelled, as one under vows of pilgrimage, to different shrines. Thus opportunity might occur for marrying Radha; and, leaving all servants behind him but a few men in whom he had perfect confidence, he took his aunt, Sukya Bai, with him as protection to his sister. No one cared to inquire who the young Rajah's agent was, or what his family affairs were. Enough that he had a sister and an aunt with him, and was conducting his secret mission with great discretion.

Thus he at length arrived at Túljapúr. The town was in a good position for his purpose, and there were many rich families and landholders in the province to be brought over. For a time he lived humbly in a hired lodging or in one of the courts of the temple. Here he had seen Gunga, and here also he daily watched Tara as she and her mother performed their worship. Even thus early the advantage of marrying his sister to the Shastri, of whose household circumstances Gunga had told him, had appeared most desirable. But Gunga did not appear able to help him, for it was clear that neither the Shastri nor his wife noticed the inferior priestesses of her class; and Tara never spoke to them. He therefore secured a good house for some months, and sent for his aunt and Radha from Pandarpur, where he had left them.

On leaving their home at Wai, and after Radha's first passion of disappointment was past, Sukya Bai and Moro Trimmul had instructed the girl what to do. Perhaps, in despair, or with the desire of all Hindu girls for an early marriage, she was an apt scholar. Radha

was to deny all knowledge of her age, to assume a childish manner, to agree modestly, and as she saw other girls do, if she were proposed for. She was promised she would be given to none but a man of wealth—her beauty would secure her this. If possible he should be young; but this was a difficult point, and what matter if he were old? She could have jewels, rich clothes, an establishment of her own and would be her own mistress.

But if she refused, or opposed these efforts in her behalf, she would soon be too old to be assisted at all. As it was, few would believe her to be within the marriageable period for Brahman girls. In a year, nay less, her marriage would be impossible, and she must be treated like a widow, and shaven and degraded.

3.—*Gunga's Cunning.*

It was his anxiety to get the matter settled that led Moro Trimmul to bribe Gunga, the temple girl, to help him in his deception, by playing upon her evident jealousy and hatred of Tara. And Gunga very quickly set to work to carry out his designs. It was first of all necessary to get Sukya Bai and Ananda acquainted; and this was brought about at the temple on the night of the ceremonies of the full moon. Ananda, as wife of the chief priest, had the power to reserve seats for her friends, and to order assistant priests to attend on them. So, as Sukya Bai was trying, apparently in vain, to reach the shrine to make her offerings with the other women, Gunga, seeing her hustled and pushed about, appealed to Ananda to assist her.

Ananda saw at once that Sukya Bai was a lady. Her rich silk garments and the heavy gold rings on her arms, wrists and ankles, showed she was wealthy, and her shaved head that she was a widow; and the Mahratta serving men who, armed with sword and shield, attended her, proved she was of some rank.

Gunga had left her under Ananda's care, and before the ceremony was finished the ladies had become excellent friends. Questions were asked, some mutual ac-

quaintances discovered, and a visit by Ananda soon followed. It soon came to pass that the ladies visited each other frequently. Sukya had a point to gain, so had her niece Radha, and both worked in concert with the girl Gunga, to whom whatever happened was related. Her fresh instructions from day to day guided them perfectly in the way to gain the goodwill of mother and daughter.

Sukya, proud of her own birth and family, found Ananda perfectly in agreement with herself on that subject. She saw the wealth and comfort of the house, she led Ananda to tell her of their domestic cares, and offered her sympathy, which was accepted. "Ah, yes, if the Shastri would only marry again!" said Ananda to her in confidence, "and there should be a son born, they would take him to Benares and devote him to Siva. They had wealth; yet without a son, it was a weight and a care to them."

For some time Ananda said nothing to Sukya Bai of the subject nearest to her heart. But as she saw how friendly the two girls were becoming, she consulted Tara, and found that she agreed with her that, if Vyas Shastri were willing to take a second wife, he could not do better than marry Radha. The only question that remained was whether Radha's family would consent.

At last, therefore, Ananda opened her whole heart to her new friend, and in the end found the sympathy she had expected. Yes, the more Sukya Bai considered the matter, the more, as she told Ananda, was she convinced it would be an admirable arrangement. "Radha had once been betrothed as a mere child," she said; "the person had died lately, else they were to have been married this year. Delay had occurred because the intended husband was poor. He had not sufficient to pay the expenses of the ceremonies. Then Radha's father had died, then her mother, when Moro Trimmul was as yet a youth. He had made no provision for his sister. How could he? So she remained unmarried. Another marriage must have been sought for this year, and Ananda's proposal was most welcome."

Now, all this was true enough in some respects, but not entirely. It was enough, however, for two simple persons to believe; and such inquiries as they could make from people who knew Wai, confirmed what had been told them by their new acquaintance. Was the girl herself willing? Apparently she was. And she received, with all the bashfulness and interest necessary to the occasion, the proposal made to her by Tara on the part of her mother.

Ananda and Tara decided to mention the matter to the Shastri the same evening. He was in good humour. His greatest care about Tara was removed. She had been accepted as a priestess of the goddess and had recovered from her excitement. The long expensive journey to Benares had been saved, and half a year's rent had just come in from his estate. The crops were good, and prices were high.

His abundance of wealth gave Ananda an opportunity of opening the subject. "What are we to do with it all?" her husband asked, laughingly, that evening, as the bag containing the Shastri's dues was brought from the temple by the attendant clerk.

"We will marry you with it," said the wife. "Tara and I have determined upon it in our own minds and oh, my dear honoured husband, you are not the object! We have kept this from you as yet; but you will agree, we have found a treasure, a jewel, such as we can give to you, and be proud and thankful to see you wear."

Then Ananda explained everything to her husband and found little difficulty in persuading him. Watching her opportunity, as a wife best knows how to do, she went direct to the point, and, seconded by Tara, smoothed away all difficulties and won the victory.

That was a happy evening for the three. It was not too late to confirm the act, and the preparations were soon made. A few lumps of sugar-candy and some spices were placed on a silver dish, and garlands of fresh flowers brought from the flower-sellers. Ananda dressed herself in one of her best suits, and Tara pre-

on a simple new garment befitting her position. Several of the servants who had suspected the matter, poured forth their congratulations. A marriage, with all the new clothes, and feasting; oh, it would be delightful! And now the betrothal sugar was to be taken, so the matter was decided. Might they accompany the lady? Yes, they were all to come, and one was to go and prepare the lady Sukya. And so, finally, preceded by pipe and drum, the little procession went forth into the street.

The preparation by Sukya had been made, and the girl Radha, dressed by her aunt and Gunga, in a rich *saree* of orange and gold, with wreaths of flowers hanging about her, had been placed on the dais in the house where they lodged. She wore heavy ornaments of gold, and Ananda felt proud of her selection for her lord, as well for Radha's great beauty as for the wealth of which she had evidence. No, she was no common girl. Here were no crowds of poor relations; even money was needless.

The music continued to play a merry measure suited to the ceremony. The girl's forehead was marked with the sacred colours; a fragrant paste rubbed upon her hands and arms by Ananda and Tara. Rice and other grain sprinkled over her head, money poured into her lap, and sugar put into her mouth; while the sacred hymn from the Veda was chanted by Tara and her mother, and joined in by those who had collected around.

Then all went into the household temple of the dwelling and paid their adoration to Bhavani and Lakshmi, and the rite was finished. Radha was the betrothed wife of Vyas Shastri.

"May you be happy, O my sister!" said Moro Trimmul, who, though present, had not interfered further than to direct the ceremonies. "Surely this is a fortunate day for us all. Now I go to the temple to lay my offerings before the Mother, and, with your permission, lady, I will visit the Shastri to-morrow. Long have I desired to know him, for the fame of his learning has gone far and wide; but who would make

a stranger known to him ? and surely it is providential that our houses have thus been united."

"You will be welcome, sir," said Ananda, as she rose to take her departure.

CHAPTER IV.

AN AGENT OF SIVAJI.

I. *Politics.*

Ananda, energetic and practical housewife as she was, at once began to make great preparations for the marriage. What stores of flour, and rice, and ghee and spices, were laid in! What gorgeous dresses were chosen—silk and gold *sarees*; silk and cotton mixed; plain cotton with silk borders; bodice pieces stiff with gold and embroidery! Then how busy the goldsmiths were! In the Shastri's court-yard half-a-dozen men were to be seen sitting over pans of charcoal, blow-pipe in hand, beating silver and gold on small anvils, and making them into heavy and beautiful ornaments.

Meanwhile Vyas Shastri and Moro Trimmul had met, and, consulting together, had found a lucky day in the calendar a month hence, and it was at once fixed upon for the ceremony. The two men quickly became great friends. Moro Trimmul was young, handsome and (when he liked) charming in manner; and he did his best to make himself agreeable to the Shastri. They belonged to different schools of philosophy—Vyas Shastri to the ancient, and as he considered it, orthodox Vedantic School; Moro Trimmul to the more modern doctrines of the Puranas. So they had discussions, or they played at chess; both being skilful at the game—the Shastri calm and steady, and the Pundit fiery and impetuous.

It was not long before they began to discuss the politics which then agitated the country. They lived under the same Muhammadan Government, that of Bijapur: but while Tuljapur and the districts round it were as yet in entire subjection, the wild rugged country beyond Wai—the mountain-valleys of the Ghats

stretching into the Dekhan—had never been completely subdued by the Muhamnadan rulers. Here it was that many of the oldest Mahratta families had taken refuge; and it was among these families that a league was being formed to resist the Muslim Government of Bijapur.

On the other hand, Bijapur had already been attacked by the immense power of the Moghul Emperors of Delhi; and it seemed likely that it would share the fate of the neighbouring Muslim kingdom of Ahmednagar, which had been conquered by Shahjahán twenty years before. It was in the strife between these two Muhamnadan powers that the Hindu families of the Dekhan saw the means of winning freedom from both. So, while pretending to submit both to the Moghuls and to the older dynasty of Bijapur, the Mahrattas were silently forming their secret combination, of which Moro Trimmul was one of the many agents employed by Rajah Sivaji, the leader of the movement.

Sivaji, encouraged by his mother, a clever and ambitious lady of high family, aimed at becoming the head of a Mahratta league. At the time of which we write, he was strengthening himself in his own wild country, collecting followers, persuading those who still held aloof, fortifying his mountain strongholds, and making a name for himself among his people by his sudden and successful raids. He treated with both the rival Muhamnadan powers by turns, but, taking his own course, was in reality faithful to neither.

Sivaji was believed by his people to receive help from heavenly powers. The goddess Bhavani was the guardian deity of his family, and she had, it was said, chosen Sivaji to be the scourge of the foreigners. Sivaji's mother saw glorious visions of her son leading the Mahrattas to victory against the Muslims; and these visions were believed.

As yet these prophecies were circulated privately among the people, but there was not a Mahratta, far or near, who did not know of them. Ballads were

written about them, and sung at fairs and markets. Women composed and chanted verses as the household mills flew merrily round in the early morning. Men sang them to their oxen as they ploughed, or drew water from their wells. And so a spirit spread through the people which in the end became irresistibly powerful.

This excitement, too, led men to the worship of Bhavani at all her most celebrated shrines. And in order to gather her worshippers together, to excite them to action, and to warn them to be ready when the time arrived—agents, such as Moro Trimmul, were sent out everywhere by the young chieftain. Nothing appeared on the surface. Experience had taught extreme caution. There were no assemblies of armed men, no displays of force. An occasional successful raid by Sivaji kept up what might well be called the national spirit; but all delayed to strike, till, in the expressive Mahratta phrase, “the fire was on the hills.”

Moro Trimmul very cleverly confided to Vyas Shastri some of the plans of his prince, and sought his advice and help. He asked for information about the Mahratta families of the neighbourhood, all friends of the Shastri. He did not mention Pahar Singh, the robber chieftain of Itga, with whom he was in communication, as he found him fickle and undecided, and extravagant in his demands for estates and other rewards. Nor did he reveal that more important secret, known only to Sivaji and himself, in which the success of their present enterprise rested. This was the fact that Khan Muhammad, the Wazir, or Prime Minister, of Bijapur, might be persuaded to turn traitor and join them. He was then, with a large army, lying at Naldrug, only twenty miles from Tuljapur; and Moro was waiting for an answer to a letter which had been sent to the Wazir, at his own request, through the Gosai banker's agent at Tuljapur. But the Pundit was not very hopeful of winning the Wazir to his cause, as he did not trust him. It was from the Mahratta families he

expected most; and he knew that at the coming festival, most of the province would assemble at Tuljapur.

Moro Trimmul did not expect Vyas Shastri to become an enthusiastic helper. He had no quarrel with the Muhammadans. The governor of the province often asked his advice in judicial matters concerning Hindus, and he was treated with consideration by them, and had even been invited to the King's Court. Still he was willing to help Moro Trimmul by introducing him to the gentry of the province, provided that he were not asked to take a prominent part in what should follow.

"After the (marriage) ceremony," Moro Trimmul said to the Shastri, "Radha, of course, will remain with you. Sukya Bai will return to Wai with the servants. Give me, then, letters to such families as you please, and I will go alone. Introduce me as a reciter of plays, and I will make my own way unnoticed and unsuspected."

To this plan Vyas Shastri gave his cordial consent. Moro Trimmul would go before the *Naw Ratri* (the nine days before Dussera) and return for the festival.

2. *The Wedding and after.*

Seldom had there been a merrier wedding. What jokes were played off by Radha's brother, who was very clever at disguising himself, and dressed himself up as a Muhammadan Fakir or a Brahman beggar. Teasing his sister, playing a sly joke on Ananda, tormenting the Shastri in various ways, Moro Trimmul was the life of the party.

Then, what music! All the pipers of the country were there, and drums of all kinds. Village bands, the temple musicians, the hired performers, and dancing women, all playing different tunes at the same moment.

And, to be sure, what feasting! The household cooking-pans were not half big enough, and those of the temple had to be borrowed; and the neighbours'

kitchens on both sides were filled with cooks. Maunds of rice, butter, vegetable stews, and curries; sweet things, hot things, savoury things—all kinds of things good to eat—were provided. And the men ate and ate by hundreds and hundreds at a time till they could eat no more.

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One by one the ceremonies were finished. The last was the solemn rite of actual marriage. The bride and bridegroom sat side by side, and the sacred thread was wound round them by the attendant Brahmans, and the mystic hymns chanted. Their garments were then tied together in a knot, and they repeated vows and promises to love and cherish each other. Finally Radha's veil was raised, and Vyas Shastri saw his young wife's beautiful face for the first time.

So it was all finished at last: the guests departed, the courts were swept, and the house again cleaned out. The garlands of leaves and flowers still hung at the gate, and from pillar to pillar of the verandah; and certain ceremonies to be performed at the temple were all that remained of the outer show of the marriage. Within was the girl-bride, happy in being free from her brother, whom she feared though she loved him, and from her aunt, whom she disliked as well as feared; happy in her new sister-wife, to whom she felt like a daughter; happier in Tara, a sister in truth, and she never had known one before; content too, to see her husband, and to feel that her beauty grew on him—for as yet, beyond a few words, they had not spoken.

As Moro Trimmul had determined, Sukya Bai was sent to their home a few days after the ceremony. She had pleaded hard to be allowed to stay over the *Naw Ratri* festival and Ananda had asked the favour at her suggestion; but her nephew was firm in his refusal, yet not so as to display anger or vexation. It was simply impossible, he said; she had been too long absent from home, and he himself must go on his own affairs. So she received parting gifts of rich silk cloths from Radha, Ananda, and the Shastri, and departed to Wai.

The last night that Moro Trimmul was to remain at Tuljapur, he told Radha that he should pretend to go out, but conceal himself in the court which was not lighted, and that she was to come to him when all were asleep or retired; he should wait for her there, for he had much to say to her.

So he had. Day by day, since he had become a friend of the Shastri's family, he had seen Tara, spoken to her, amused her, and secretly admired her beauty; and yet he had done nothing towards winning her. Gunga, he saw, could not help him; for Tara utterly refused to have anything to do with the lower priestesses of the temple. Therefore he made up his mind that his sister must assist him in his plans.

He waited long, for the girl could not get away unobserved. At last she came, terrified lest her absence should be noticed; but all were asleep—Tara beside her in the verandah, the Shastri among his books in the book room, Ananda in her own sleeping-room within. She found her brother in a bad temper at being kept waiting.

"Take this," he said to her, returning a gold anklet of Tara's, which Radha had borrowed from her to be copied; "for I go to-morrow early, and shall not see you again till the *Naw Ratri*. But you have kept me long, girl, and I had much to say to you."

"The Shastri was awake reading: even till now I could not pass his door," she said; "be quick, brother."

"Ah, you are trembling. Is this the girl who would have fled to Sivaji Rajah; and are you changed already into a Shastri's wife?" he said, with a sneer.

The girl shivered. "Do not say such things, brother. I strive to put them away, and they will go, when no one tells me of him."

Her brother laughed. "No, they shall not go, Radha, if I can prevent it; but you must be patient, girl. So much for yourself; now for me."

"What can I do, brother?"

"You can gain Tara for me. Nay, Radha," he continued, as she trembled still more, and hung to the

court door in terror, "none of this cowardice! I tell you it must be, and you must do it."

"Brother! brother!" gasped the girl, piteously. "Not I—not I! What can I do? O, not I! O, not I!"

"What can you do? Much," he replied, sharply; "Speak to her of me, lead her to think for me, tell her what deeds I have done with your Rajah—and sing her our country ballads. I tell you, girl, if you do all this, it will gain her."

"Never, brother, never; she has no heart for you. She shuddered yesterday when I spoke of you. I saw her—I could not be mistaken. Her heart is with the gods, in her books, cold and dead. O brother, think not of her! What can I do?"

"Radha, you must do it, you!—else"—he felt the girl shivering as he grasped her arm, and shook her savagely—"else, will you be long here? Would this Shastri keep you one hour in his house if he thought, much less if he knew, you had been married before, girl? Yes, married before! Ah, that touches you! And listen more, if my affair is not furthered he shall know it. What if he cast you out? Do you hear?"

"I—I," gasped the terrified girl, "I hear—I hear. O brother, be not cruel. do not destroy me; or if you will one blow of your knife—now—now—here," and she bared her breast. "It will be mercy—strike!"

"Poor fool," said Moro Trimmul, "I would not harm you. Go, remember what I have said, and do as I tell you. I can wait no longer. Fear not, my blessing is on you," and he put his hands on her head. "For his sake, my lord, my prince and yours, you shall come to no harm. Go!" And saying this he put her gently away from him into the court, closed the door, and easily climbing the low wall dropped into the street beyond.

"One thing more before the night passes," he said, as he walked rapidly through the deserted streets to the house they had lived in, near the Shastri's: "if she is there, well; if not, I must seek her."

He entered the court and locked the gate behind

him. A lamp was burning in a recess of the verandah, and its light fell upon the figure of the girl Gunga, who had covered herself with a sheet, and, weary with waiting for him, had fallen asleep. Moro Trimmul stood over her, and, as he did so, she moved uneasily in her sleep. Then some cruel thoughts passed suddenly through his mind. Gunga knew too much; a blow of his knife would silence for ever all chance of what had been done for Radha becoming known; the gold he had to give her would be saved. There was a large well or cistern behind the house; it was a place where the women of the town washed their clothes, and was held to be unclean. That would hide her. A Murli? What Murli had not jealousies and strifes? Who would care for her? And he drew the dagger and stood over her in an attitude to strike.

Why he hesitated he could never tell; certainly it was not from fear. Perhaps some lingering feeling of compassion for one so young stayed the blow for an instant, for he did not strike. The light fell full on her eyes and face as she turned, and she smiled and awoke suddenly.

"Why the knife?" she cried, quickly sitting up, as the light gleamed on the blade. "Moro!—I—I—I fear you; why do you look at me so? Ah!" and she covered her eyes with her hand, expecting death.

"Only to cut these strings," he said, with a hard laugh, recovering himself and cutting the cord which was tied round the paper containing the gold anklets. "Look, Gunga!" and he held them up to the light, and shook them till the little bells on them clashed gently.

"You are good," she said, looking up as he held them above her, still shaking them: "they are very, very beautiful, but you will not give them to me, for you have not got Tara."

"But my sister is her father's wife, and these are heavier than Tara's. I have not broken faith with you Gunga," he replied, "nor my oath at the Pâp-nâs temple. Take them—they are yours henceforth.

And now will you go with me, Gunga? I have prepared a horse for you."

"To the end of life," cried the girl, who had risen to her knees to put on the anklets, and who now clasped his feet,—“to the end of life! Kill me if you will, Moro Trimmul, who would care? It would be no pain to Gunga.”

CHAPTER V.

THE HAUNTED TEMPLE.

I. *The Watchers.*

It was late in a sultry afternoon, and a thick heavy rain was falling, which had lasted all day without a stop. The sky was covered with grey cloud; and dark masses of clouds, accompanied by heavier bursts of rain, kept coming up slowly from the south-west, causing a deeper gloom as they passed overhead. The constant monotonous plash of the rain on a wide plain sounded like a dull roar.

In the porch of an ancient Hindu temple, which stood behind a large banyan tree on a bit of rising ground overlooking the plain, three men were sheltering

Every now and then, when the rain slackened a little, one would throw a coarse black blanket about him, and go outside and look out along the muddy road over the plain. All three were heavily armed with long straight swords, shields of stout hide, and daggers stuck in their girdles. In the chamber of the temple behind them, their three guns leaned against the wall.

Two of the men were stout squarebuilt fellows, with dark faces, and rounded shoulders. They were twin brothers, and, being Mahratta, had been named Rama and Lakhshman, after the popular heroes of the "Ramayana." They were very much alike; but the expression of Rama was gloomy and even savage, while that of Lakhshman was cheerful and good-natured.

Their companion, who was evidently the leader of the party, was a younger man. His comparatively fair complexion and regular features, as well as the caste mark on his forehead, showed him to be a Rajput. He was much taller than the other two, and his dress showed him to be of much higher rank. Gopal Singh

(for that was his name), the nephew of the Robber-chief Pahar Singh of Itga, was decidedly good-looking; but his handsome face had a look of cruelty and lawlessness.

Seated on a heap of stones (for it was his turn to keep watch), Gopal Singh was steadily watching the road, as it wound away over the plain, and two villages, known as Big Kinny and Little Kinny—the first about a mile away, and the other about half a mile farther on. He was evidently expecting someone coming from that direction. At last a heavier burst of rain blotted out all the view, and Gopal Singh returned to the porch, where he stood looking gloomily at the downpour.

“He will never get across the river Benathura to-day, my friends,” he said, stepping into a dry corner of the porch and sitting down; “and we have a weary journey to Itga before us in this mud; yet I dare not face my uncle without some news of him.”

“Jemadar,” replied Rama, respectfully, folding his hands—“I know the Benathura, and it will not come down before night; and if it be true that the man left Kulliani yesterday, he ought to have come a good distance before night; and if he started again this morning, there is no river, or *nulla*, between to stop him but the Benathura, and that will be fordable till midnight, even with heavier rain than this. He would not stay for the rain to clear?”

“He must have left it,” replied Gopal Singh; “he dared not stay there. One of our people was to accompany him to a village half-way to Allund yesterday, and send him on from there with guides from village to village. We offered an escort at Kulliani, but he would take no one—the fellow was suspicious.”

“Then he is quite safe, Jemadar. The guides may plague him; but if he started under instructions from our own friends, he will be passed on carefully,” returned Rama.

“I hope he is, brothers. I would not lose our chance of the gold he has for something—nor indeed of himself.”

"Gold!" cried both eagerly, in a breath.

"Yes, my friends: good royal mohurs, I know; for the day before yesterday he rested at Kulliani at the Gosai's monastery, and had a Hundi cashed in the shop. It was a goodly pouchful, I know, and it will come to us if we wait patiently."

"Some one must look again," he continued, after a while. "Go you, Lakhshman, take the blanket and sit close."

"Shall I go on to Kinny," said the man, "and see if I can get tidings of him? Better that than sitting up there like a drenched scarecrow in a field."

"Good, brother, go! Try the *nulla* before you venture into the middle of it, lest it be too strong for you," said Rama.

"And wait there for a time," added the leader. "If he do not arrive before night you can bring some flour, ghee, and sugar from the village: for if we are to watch here all night we shall have to eat. But if the man comes, bring him on—he will be well-mounted and will not fear the *nulla*, and you can invent something about going back to Allund on urgent business."

"Trust me for that, Jemadar. If I have an ugly face I can speak soft words when I choose, and I know enough of the camp language to make him understand. Now, I am going." So saying, he doubled the blanket so as to form a cloak, threw it over his head and shoulders, and folded the sides tightly about him: then taking off his sandals, which he carried in his hand, he strode away in the rain, as rapidly as the mud would allow.

2. *The Traveller.*

In the morning of the same day, a servant was holding a powerful grey horse before the door of a house in the main street of Surruri, a small village nearly midway between the towns of Kulliani and Allund. Within, a man, evidently of a superior class, was girding up his waist with a shawl, and preparing himself for a day's journey. He was a man of middle height, rather thin, and slightly stooping, and was evidently

more accustomed to sitting at a desk than to a rough open-air life; and the sword he had just fastened to his waist-belt was more for ornament than for use. His face was not bad-looking; but the expression showed a weak character, and his eyes were restless and suspicious.

Lala Tulsi Das was not a native of the Dekhan, but had served for the last two years in the Record office of the Emperor Aurangzib. He had been sent from Delhi to his uncle, who was in the Emperor's service; and being a good Persian scholar, he had obtained a confidential post about the Emperor himself.

He had waited several hours to see if the rain would stop; but as his business was urgent, and there seemed no chance of the weather clearing up, he decided to delay no longer. So he called his host, an old lay monk of the monastery at Kulliani, to bid him farewell.

"How far did you say it was, Bawa-Palit?" he asked.

"It is about twenty miles," said his host.

"Let me see," said the Lala: "here is my route. Ah! Kinny, big and little. I suppose I can rest at either village, though I should prefer to get on to Allund." "Certainly," replied the old man. "But do not stop at Kinny, if you can help it. Above all, do not take shelter at the temple on the hill, under the banyan tree."

"What is the matter with it?" Asked the Lala. "I suppose there are spirits or devils, as usual. I am not afraid of them."

"All the same," said his host, "take my advice: and when you change guides at Kinny, ask them to send you by the south road. It would not be pleasant to meet Pahar Singh's men. But here is the Patel," he added, as the village headman entered the house. "He will direct you himself, and give you a guide."

They followed the Patel through the village, and at the gate found the guide to the next village waiting for them. Lala Tulsi Das mounted his horse, and said farewell to his host.

"Don't forget the south road from Kinny," shouted the old man after him as he rode away.

In the first part of his journey Lala Tulsi Das did not fare badly. The road was pretty firm, the rain not very heavy, and the river Benathura was crossed easily. But later in the day the rain came down in torrents, the plain seemed covered with water, and the road was so deep in mud that the Lala's horse could scarcely struggle on.

At last towards evening he came to the junction of two roads, and the guide paused, as if uncertain which to take. One evidently led to a village which they had seen for some time past; the other, leaving the village to the left, led apparently in the direction of a clump of trees standing out against the sky. Tulsi Das knew no Kanarese and but little Mahratta; but he managed to understand the guide to say, in answer to his question, that the village to the left was Little Kinny, the clump of trees was the banyan tree against which he had been warned, and that near it, to the right, was the other village of Big Kinny. The guide struck into the road on the right, leading to Big Kinny; while Tulsi Das mentally resolved to avoid the banyan tree beyond.

A short time before the Lala had reached this point, Lakhshman had come down to Big Kinny, and was welcomed at the village gate by the old Patel, the Patwari, and a few of the village farmers, who were sitting in the deep gateway.

"We thought you had given it up and gone away," said the old Patel, "or we should have sent some food up to you. Have you had anything to eat, friend?"

"Nothing but a bit of stale cake I had in my waist-cloth," replied Lakhshman.

"Take him away to the house and give him something to eat," ordered the Patel.

"And no one has passed since morning?" asked Lakhshman.

"Not a creature. It is not weather to send the dogs out. No, he won't come to-day. But go and eat, friend."

"Very good: call me if I am wanted," said Lakhshman, as he went into the village.

"What does he want out such a day as this?" asked the Patwari. "What has Pahar Singh in hand just now?"

"What does it matter to us, Rao Sahib?" returned the Patel; "all we have to do is to keep his people in good humour, to save our cattle from being harried, our stacks from being burned, and our people," he added, looking round at the farmers and their wives, "from being robbed when they come from market. That is worth what we pay him."

"No, no; do not interfere," said a chorus of farmers' voices, who, in those unsettled times, might, unless their village were known to be under the protection of some local chieftain, at any time have their flocks and herds swept away by the people of a more powerful village, or by any of the independent gentry, or barons, as we may call them, of the country. "What have we to do with state affairs, or with Pahar Singh either?"

So the assembly having voted non-interference with whatever might be in hand, our friend Lakhshman was allowed to get his meal in peace.

Lakhshman had scarcely finished his meal, when one came running to tell him the traveller had arrived.

"Here is the man who will be your worship's guide," said the Patel respectfully to our friend the Lala, who, having arrived safely, had now taken off his upper clothing, which some of the men were drying in the opposite room, and was seated in the place of honour of the assembly; "but your worship should eat before you go on, and the Rao Sahib here will take you to his house--a Brahman's house," he added, as the Lala appeared to hesitate.

"Ah, no, sir," returned the traveller, who indeed was very hungry, "I could not eat unless I bathed, and I had better wait till I get to Allund. Many thanks! I should be too long about it, and my horse

has had his feed, and is ready to go on. And this is the guide?—not beautiful exactly."

"No, Maharaj, I am not beautiful," said Lakhshman, "but I may be useful to you. You may trust me, my lord. The Patel knows me, and so do all these worthy gentlemen; and am I not come for you?"

"They expect me, then, good fellow," replied the Lala, amused by the man's broken Urdu, and his comical expression of face.

"Ah, yes, noble sir," answered the man, joining his hands, "ever since morning; and as I was coming here on business I was told to bring you on. And now let us proceed, or else it will be night before we reach Allund; and," he added, with a wink to the Patel, "it is not good to be out late on the roads."

"What, are they dangerous, then?" asked the Lala, looking anxiously around him.

"O no," cried Lakhshman; "there is no trouble in the country, and my lord is armed, and so am I. O no, only in regard to the mud and the stones."

"There was a tree and a temple which I was told to avoid, and I was told to ask to be sent by the south road," said the Lala, preparing to mount.

Lakhshman exchanged glances with the Patel and the Patwari. "Could any one have warned the stranger?" they thought.

"A tree!" said the Patel, gravely. "What tree? do you know any, Lakhshman? And the south road? what road?"

"O, I suppose the noble gentleman means that by Navindgee, and Hoshully, and Chik-Wondully, and Hully Sullgarra," said Lakhshman, rolling out a volley of hard Kanarese village names. "That road? Why, it is twelve miles farther from here! They should have sent him by it from Surruri. No," he continued, dropping the Lala's stirrup, which he had taken in his hand, "if the gentleman likes to go he can do so, of course, but his slave begs to be excused;" and he put his joined hands up to his nose.

"Very good," said the Lala, "I don't know. You know best."

"Come, mount then, my lord," said Lakhshman
"Let us get on."

And with a salutation all round, the Lala rode out of the gate, our friend Lakhshman calling to the guide, who carried the bundle, as they passed on over the village common.

CHAPTER VI.

FALLEN AMONG THIEVES.

I. *Caught.*

The mile or so which lay between the village and the temple was soon passed; and as they began to ascend the short rising ground towards the temple and the tree, the latter could be seen in all its wild picturesque detail, and was indeed a striking object.

As the travellers reached the summit, the sky cleared, the rain ceased, and the sun sinking towards the west, shone out, lighting up the two villages behind them. To the south, the plain stretched away for many miles; and behind all was the great black cloud of the day's rain, upon which a light rainbow was forming.

"It is a fair country, friend, after all," said Tulsi Das, as he paused to look at the view, "though it did not look well in the rain. That plain yonder is in the direction of Bijapur, perhaps?"

"It is, sir," replied Lakhshman; "that high land near the sky yonder, is beyond the Bhima river, and if"—

"*Namascar, Maharaj,*" cried a clear manly voice close beside the Lala's horse. Tulsi Das started, for he had not noticed the approach of Gopal Singh and Rama from the temple.

"Who are these?" exclaimed the Lala, beginning to tremble—"who are these?" and the warning of the old monk now came upon him. "Who are you?" he asked anxiously.

"O, this is my brother Rama," said Lakhshman, "and that is our Jemadar Gopal Singh; they only waited here while I went to Kinny."

"Be not alarmed, noble sir," added Gopal Singh, laughing, and in good Urdu, "there is nothing to fear. Your worship is from Kulliani, perhaps?"

"Yes, from Kulliani yesterday."

"Ah, yes, I remember; you were at Purungir's monastery. I was just about leaving when you arrived, and the old man offered you the escort of my party, but you preferred staying."

"I—I—I—had business," replied the Lala, stammering, not exactly liking Gopal Singh's bold looks, and yet unable to object to him. "I was tired and needed rest, and you could not wait."

"You had come from the royal court. I think they said, and were going to Bijapur with letters for the King—proposals for peace, perhaps."

"So they said—who?" The Lala had supposed his destination and business secret; yet they appeared known, and to a perfect stranger, too, by the wayside. He did not feel able to reply, and was almost inclined to trust to his horse's speed and break through the men. The men, however, looked carelessly to the priming of their guns, but to the Lala's mind, with meaning, and as if he should understand the action. Lakhshman's face, too, appeared changed—it was not so pleasant as it had been.

"Come," said Gopal Singh "we have far to go to-night, and as he spoke he touched the horse's rein. 'Come on, my son!'" he said, and the horse followed.

As they passed the little temple in its loneliness under the shadow of the huge tree, it looked a place for evil deeds. A large horned owl on the highest branch, now awakening for his evening flight, hooted loudly above them, and was answered by another. It seemed an evil omen, and struck to the Lala's heart.

"Ah! we cannot pass you, my friend," said Gopal Singh. "Look, Lala Sahib, what my gun can do."

As he spoke, he raised the piece and fired. The aim was true and deadly, and the huge bird fell down heavily close to the horse's feet with a rushing sound, causing the animal to start back.

"I never miss," said the man, decidedly, and reloading his piece. "Now come on."

"Shabash! Well shot," said the Lala; but his heart was throbbing fast, and it was a positive relief

to him when the dark grove was behind them, and they emerged upon the bare, wild, open plain beyond.

"A lonely place that, Jemadar," remarked the Lala, turning to the man who walked behind him; "and the old monk where I slept, advised me not to go by it; he said Pahar Singh's men might be about. Who is this Pahar Singh?"

"Pahar Singh?" returned the Jemadar. "O, a worthy gentleman who is quiet enough when not plagued. He is the lord of the marches hereabouts—a valiant man, and a good soldier; and in these troubled times, Lalaji, has his friends and his enemies, like most of us: 'tis the way of the world."

Somehow the tone in which Gopal Singh spoke disturbed Tulsi Das, and he began to have a vague fear of this Pahar Singh. He became more suspicious when, after another mile, his guide was dismissed and sent home. But he could not object, as the man seemed really tired out, and was walking lame. He noticed, too, that as they travelled on, the two followers of Gopal Singh kept close to the bridle of his horse.

As the sun set, they came to a little stream, and the party halted.

"Come," said Gopal Singh, "dismount and rest here a little while, Lalaji, while I offer my evening libations to the four elements in the stream."

"No, I will not dismount, Jemadar," returned the Lala; "you will not be long, and by all means let your men get a drink of water too, and wash their feet. I will stay here."

"He is not to be trusted," said the Jemadar to his men in Kanarese; "I see it in his eyes. If he stirs, shoot him, and both of you stay by him."

"Tie him up," suggested Rama, "we must not trust him in the dark on that good horse."

"A good thought," said Gopal Singh; "give me his sheet from the saddle."

The Lala guessed what had been said, and protested and resisted violently. But he was as a child in the hands of the men, and in a few moments his hands

and arms were bound to his body gently within the sheet, but so that he could not use them. He was trembling violently as the bandage was fastened behind him.

"Ah, sir! do not shake so," said Lakhshman, smiling, and joining his own hands in mock supplication; "if you do, you will go to pieces, and there will be none of you left when we get to our uncle, Pahar Singh."

Pahar Singh! the Lala's heart sank within him.

"Where are you going to take me, Jemadar?" he asked; trembling, as they crossed the stream. "Ah, be merciful to——"

"So you have got speech at last," returned Gopal Singh. "Listen Lala. Pahar Singh, my uncle, is lord of these marches, and knows what to do with you. One thing, however, I may tell you; if you make any attempt to escape, I will shoot you. It is not your body that he wants, but what you have on it; the gold you got at Kulliani. Now, beware, for you know the worst."

Resistance was of no use, and the Lala clung to life. They might take his gold. There remained, at least, the papers he possessed; and if he begged his way on foot to Bijapur, what matter, so that he got there with them?

So they proceeded as rapidly as the ground would allow, still continuing to avoid all villages by paths through the fields, which they seemed to know perfectly.

2. *The Robber Chief.*

About the time that Lala Tulsi Das and Lakhshman reached the banyan tree, a company of about thirty armed horsemen were riding down a steep stony path to the pretty village of Itga.

Their clothes were worn and weather-stained, and the harness of the horses was soiled with the wet and mud of the day.

It was clear that this party had ridden far, and the horses, though excellent, were, from their drooping heads and sluggish action, evidently weary. Four of

the men had been wounded in some skirmish, for it was with difficulty they sat their horses: and the bandages about them, covered with blood, showed the wounds to have been severe. But the sight of the village appeared to have revived the party. The horses were neighing and tossing their heads, and the men, shifting their places in the saddles, pointed eagerly to it, or, brandishing their spears, shouted one to another, cheering up the wounded men. The sun's gleams, glinting from spear-head, helmet, and steel armour as the men swayed in their saddles, lighted up faces of varied character, all now joyous, but wearing an expression of habitual recklessness and lawless excitement.

Below them, at less than half a mile's distance, was the village itself. In the centre of it was a high square castle, with round bastions at the corners, having loopholed parapets. On one high bastion, in which several small cannon were placed, was a flag-staff, and a large white flag, bordered with green, which floated out lazily upon the evening breeze, showing the device—a figure cut out in red cloth and sewn upon the white—of the monkey god Hanuman, who was the guardian divinity of the castle.

Around the foot of the castle walls were the terraced houses of the village, surrounded by a high outer wall. The whole formed a very strong position, that could not be taken by any attack of marauding horsemen, and which could hold out stoutly against even a well-organised force.

The owner of this village was Pahar Singh. He was a frontier officer of the Bijapur State, and as "Hazari," or commander of a thousand horse, he held his lands on condition of keeping up a troop of cavalry and a number of foot-soldiers. Pahar Singh, however, had by no means followed his father's example of steady devotion to the Bijapur Government. Even while his father lived he had led the retainers in lawless border raids, bringing his father's good name into bad repute. And after the old man's death, he often openly defied the state troops, and became practically an indepen-

dent ruler in that part of the country. He established a system of blackmail all over the frontier near his estate; and even merchants and rich travellers who had to cross his part of the frontier found it best to pay Pahar Singh's dues in order to escape outrage and violence.

The party of horsemen had descended the small pass from the table-land above, and entered the village gate. As they rode on to the castle, they were welcomed by the villagers and shopkeepers, and greeted by the firing of guns from the castle walls.

The horsemen remained mounted after halting in the castle yard, and several stout serving-men took the heavy bags of money which each in succession loosed from his saddlebow, and carried them into the castle. This done, the leader dismounted, and the chief "Karkun," or scribe, delivered a short but pleasant message from the chief, and dismissed the rest; and the men, wheeling round, fired off their guns, and separated, each to his own house.

"He will not delay you long," said Amrut Rao, Pahar Singh's chief scribe, to the leader; "but you are not to go, he says, without seeing him."

"What temper is he in?" asked the leader.

"Not good—but no fear for you. He is angry at Gopal Singh's absence, that is all; so be careful, Maun Singh, and do not cross him to-day. Come, he has looked for you these many hours."

Maun Singh, an active, intelligent man, with a bright soldierly bearing, was a cousin of the chief, and a valuable and trusty leader of his expeditions. This foray had been remarkable for its success. A convoy of treasure, belonging to the neighbouring kingdom of Golkonda, had been attacked on its way to the capital, its escort defeated, and the money for the most part secured and brought in. The largest portion of the force was returning by a different road; this, consisting of picked men and horses, had pressed on home with the booty.

As he entered the court, Maun Singh greeted, and was saluted in turn by, those around; and a party of

scribes, engaged in accounts at the entrance of the hall, rose at his approach. Passing these, he went on to his relative, who was sitting reclined against a large pillow in a recess of the window, and who half rose as he returned his salutation, but not courteously.

Pahar Singh was a remarkable-looking man. He had a strong-featured, hard face, and deep-set black piercing eyes. His forehead was high and deeply wrinkled, his mouth cruel. His sandy-coloured beard and moustaches, divided in the centre, were generally drawn back over each ear, though sometimes he wore them flowing down almost to his waist. He was over forty years of age; and his physical strength was famous.

"I received your letter, Maun Singh," he said, before that person was seated. "Why did you delay? Why did you let Gopal Singh leave you? If the boy comes to hurt, your life shall answer for it."

"Pahar Singh," replied the other, who always addressed his cousin by name if he were angry, and who had less fear of him than any one else, "I have done good work. There are more than twenty thousand rupees yonder, and I have only lost one man."

"True, true, brother," cried the chief, "there is no blame for that, only for the boy. What took him to Kulliani?"

"I sent him to Purungir, the banker, with the bills, to see if any could be cashed. There he heard of something; and when all was quiet, he departed at night without my knowledge. He only left word that he had gone after some good business, and was not to be followed."

"Wrong, Maun Singh. You were wrong not to watch him—not to send men after him. If he dies, O Maun Singh, O brother, it were better you had never been born!" and the chief smote his pillow angrily with his clenched fist.

"His fate is not in my hand, Pahar Singh," retorted the other; "and——"

"Do you answer me? do you answer me?" cried

the chief, savagely grasping the pillow, the veins of his forehead swelling and his nostrils widening as he spoke.

"The hunchbacks are with him, and they are all on foot, brother," replied Maun Singh: "fear not; but if you are restless, give me some fresh men and a fresh horse, and we will ride round the villages."

"No; go home—go home. Let him hunt his own game," returned the chief.

"But about the money?" interposed the chief scribe. "The bags have never been opened—who knows what is in them?"

"It may be gold, Amrut Rao. Come, who knows? yes, who knows? Come," exclaimed Pahar Singh excitedly, and he watched the opening of every bag with an almost childish curiosity. All anxiety for his nephew had departed before the sight of money. Yet Gopal Singh was the life and stay of the house; precious as Pahar Singh's heir, and more so as the husband of his daughter, who was as yet a child.

"Good coin," cried the chief exultingly, "Good coin! O Amrut Rao, I vow all the light weights to feed Brahmans. Do you hear?"

"I am afraid their stomachs will be empty enough," replied the scribe, laughing. "No, Maharaj! do better: send five hundred to Vyas Shastri to offer at the shrine of the Holy Mother if Gopal Singh returns safe to-night. You cannot disappoint her and be secure."

"Well spoken! well spoken! Yes, put the money aside; yes, put all the light-weight coin and make it up, you shall have it—if—he comes. Ha! what is that?" he exclaimed, suddenly, as a separate bag rolled out of one then being emptied. "Gold, by all the gods! Give it me; I will count it myself."

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE ROBBER'S DEN.

I. *Prisoner.*

Meanwhile Lala Tulsi Das and his captors were drawing steadily nearer to Itga. But their progress was slow, for the paths were deep in mud and his horse was tired out.

His three companions kept silence, and answered nothing to his occasional question, "How far yet?" So Tulsi Das was thrown back on his own unpleasant thoughts. He tried to persuade himself that perhaps he was in no real danger after all, and he framed some polite speeches and recalled verses to quote from the Persian poets with which he might soften the heart of this dreadful Pahar Singh. But then would come ghastly thoughts of violence—a dungeon and chains—ending in a lingering or sudden death; and the poor Lala would break out into a cold sweat with fear, and writhe in his bonds.

At last Tulsi Das noticed a change in his companions. They began to talk among themselves, laughed heartily, and quickened their pace.

"Come, Lalaji," said Gopal Singh, "comfort yourself: we are near home now."

Almost as he spoke, they reached the brow of the hill, and looked down upon Itga in the valley below. It appeared gloomy enough to the Lala. The castle stood out against the setting moon. A light twinkled from a window over the castle gateway, and a few shone here and there about the village. Around, the fields and trees were in the deepest gloom.

"Mind the horse as we go down hill, Lakhshman," said Gopal Singh. "I must have that beast; he has done his work right well to-day."

Suddenly he fired a shot. At once a vivid white

flash shot up from one of the castle towers, as a large Bengal light was burned as an answering signal.

Pahar Singh had been watching for a long time from the window above the castle gateway.

He was very restless and moody; not even the gold could dispel the gloom. He had ordered all about him to be silent; and his little daughter, who was allowed to sit in the hall when no strangers were present, had nestled to his side, but was afraid to speak.

"Ha, by the gods! there is a shot on the road," he cried, as the sharp ring of Gopal Singh's matchlock broke the silence without; "and a horse's neigh, too. Can it be they, Maun Singh? speak! by your soul, speak: why are you silent?"

"Let the cloud pass from your spirit, brother: it is they, sure enough. I would swear to Gopal's gun by its ring anywhere."

"Burn a light from the upper bastion! it may cheer them down the pass. Quick!" cried the chief, "answer their signal. O Maun Singh! if I said anything bad, forgive me, brother; but I was mad with anxiety for that boy. Yes, they will see that," as the blue light glittered over the village.

"We may even see them. By the gods! yes, Maun Singh, there they are: the three, and a man on horse-back muffled up—a large grey horse—who can it be?"

"Ah, here they are," he continued, looking from the window; "they have brought the man's horse up to the steps, and are taking him off—bound, too! Ha! but there must be much to hear."

Gopal Singh was surrounded by the retainers and villagers, who crowded up to bid him welcome; for the anxiety in the castle had spread over the village. Bidding Lakhshman and the others search the Lala carefully and keep what was found, Gopal ascended to the court, and was met in a warm embrace by his uncle, and led to the window, where, being seated, all present, including Maun Singh, advanced to salute him in turn.

"What did I say, brother?" cried Maun Singh

joyfully. "I knew he would not disappoint us. Yet you should not have gone alone, Gopal."

"Nay, but I had the hunchbacks with me, and more would have spoiled my small hunt, which, if not so grand as yours, uncle, may yet be important," replied the young man.

"Ah, the boy, the boy!" exclaimed the chief, stroking the young man's face, and kissing the tips of his own fingers; "have I not brought him up since he was the height of my knee? And I thought him lost! He is safe and well—safe and well! My heart swells. What did I say for the Brahmans? Never mind now. Go, bathe and eat, my son, and we will see to everything afterwards."

"Not before that matter is settled, father—that is, about the man I brought with me."

"Yes, I had forgotten—certainly. Light the large lamps," cried the chief to the attendants at the lower end of the room; "let us see what manner of man he is. Who is he, Gopal?"

"That we have to find out, father. They thought him a spy of the Emperor's, and he came from Aurungabad, to Kulliani, to the Gosai's. He changed some bills for gold, and he has got it. I offered escort, but was refused; so I went to the banyan tree at Kinny, for we heard he was going to sleep at Surruri. They were sending him on privately, father."

"*Shabash!* well done, son. A spy? Well, if we are true to the King's salt, he goes no farther; and he was being sent privately! Ah, the old foxes! Here he is—what a sight!" cried the chief, breaking into loud laughter. "Who are you? What have they done to you? Speak."

2. *And Spy.*

In truth the poor Lala was a show. The order to search him had been literally obeyed, and while two stout fellows held his arms wide apart, he was helpless to struggle. Rama and Lakhshman, who would allow no one to touch him, had dived into every pocket, and felt every possible place of concealment, even to

the Lala's hair, which was loosened and hung about his shoulders. His turban had been removed and shaken out, while one end was now fastened to his right arm. The bag of gold, tied round his waist, his bundle of precious papers, his sword, dagger, and waist-shawl, had all been taken from him and made into a bundle, and the articles were carefully counted by the hunchback as they were placed, one by one, in the centre of the shawl spread out for the purpose. It was quite in vain that the Lala entreated, besought, struggled, or resisted by turns; the place, the rough men around him, all forbade hope of pity, and he submitted. Finally, Lakhshman dragging him by the end of his turban, Rama pushing him behind, and several of the others assisting, the Lala was brought into the presence of the chief, where he sank down, stupidly staring about him.

Where were all the fine speeches he had prepared, which should have carried the chief's heart at once? All the couplets, too, from the Persian poets that he was to have quoted?—All gone. His head was bare, his clothes untied and hanging loosely about him; his boots removed: and his appearance of utter helplessness, and the hopeless, piteous expression of despair in his face, might have excited compassion in any but the hardened men by whom he was surrounded.

"Who are you, knave? Speak," cried the chief sternly, again raising his voice and checking his laughter. "Who are you?"

But the Lala's terror was too great, his mouth too dry to speak. "Mercy, mercy!" was all he could gasp.

"Who are you, knave?" cried Pahar Singh again. "Whence are you come? Give a good account of yourself. Let go of him, rascals!" he continued to the men who held him; "begone all of you."

"My lord, my lord!" cried the Lala piteously; "I am a poor man of Delhi, travelling to Bijapur, on business of my own—a stranger—a poor stranger."

"What business?"

"My lord, we are merchants, and have dealings

with people there for clothes and jewels. There is a dispute about the accounts. and I have come to settle them," said the Lala glibly enough. It was one of the stories he had made up by the way.

"Who are the merchants?" asked the chief.

"The Gosais of Kulliani, where I was yesterday; they sent me on," replied the Lala.

"O, hear!" cried Gopal Singh: "they knew nothing about you except that you had a bill on them for a thousand rupees, and the money was given you in gold. Is not this true? Did I not hear it myself?"

"You are no merchant, dog," exclaimed Pahar Singh. "Ah, we are true testers of gold here; the true and the false are soon found out. Who are you? speak truly, and fear not."

"By the Holy Mother, I am what I say, a poor clerk only. O noble sirs," continued the Lala, "give me my property, and let me go. I will seek shelter in the bazaar; let me go, for the love of your children."

"A fool, a liar are you, throwing away life," returned Gopal Singh. "This is the second time I have warned you. We know you are from the royal camp, and a spy to Bijapur. Speak, else——"

"And the doom of a spy is death; and you are a liar too, and a coward as well. Look at him now, Gopal," said his uncle, interrupting and pointing to the man; "look at his coward face."

The Lala was trembling violently. His knees shook, and his teeth chattered as he shivered. He could not speak, but looked vacantly from one to another. "I am c-o-o-o-l-d--c-o-o-o-l-d," he said faintly; "the wet, sirs, and the long travel. Mercy! Mercy! I am only a merchant, let me go."

"You are cold! then we will warm you," cried the chief grimly. "Yet, speak, O Lala, ere I give the order. We would not hurt you without cause—otherwise——"

"Believe me, I am no spy. I swear by God I am no spy," he replied earnestly.

"Bind him!" cried the chief furiously. "A liar

and a spy. Make torches of his fingers! we will soon hear the truth."

3. *Treason.*

Before he knew what to do or say, the Lala was a second time bound with his own shawl; and Lakhshman, tearing a rag into strips, and soaking them in the oil of the lamp, was tying them coolly upon the ends of his fingers, one by one. "I told you, Lalaji," he said, "we are rough people here, and you should be careful. When I light these you will not like the pain, and if you bear that, he will do something worse. When he says——"

"Silence, knave! you are over-familiar," cried Maun Singh; "beware!"

"Nay, but if I can save him from the torches, uncle," returned the hunchback, with a grin, "he will perhaps be grateful, and give his wealth to me."

"Is it ready?" asked the chief.

"Quite ready, my lord," answered Lakhshman, taking one of the lighted wicks from the large lamp between his finger and thumb. "For your life, speak, good fellow," he said earnestly and under his breath to the Lala, "and save yourself this torture. One word more from him, and I dare not disobey; few bear it—speak!"

"O, my lord! my lord!" shrieked the Lala, now understanding what was intended, and throwing himself prostrate on the ground, "do not burn me alive. I will speak the truth. Why should I tell lies?"

"Very well," returned the chief. "Very well, get up; it is your own business. You have not heard of our Dekhan customs, perhaps, or I should not have wasted words on you. Speak, who sent you? the Emperor, Alamgir? He cannot help you now."

"He would have no mercy on me if he knew—if he had me in his power," murmured the Lala. "Loose me, my lord, and I will speak the truth. Loose me, and have these rags taken from my fingers."

"When you have told the truth, Lala; not till then." said Pahar Singh, slowly. "Do you hear? Away, all

of you!" he cried to the attendants, who had crowded round the Lala. "Keep the torch alight. Now, Lala," he continued, as the man stood alone below the dais, "speak. Once more, and this is my last warning; if I hear any more lies I will end that coward life of yours."

"Beware!" added Gopal Singh, "I would not be as you are with that lying tongue of yours--no, not for lakhs. Remember that he, my uncle, never relents."

"I would rather speak to you alone," said the Lala.

"We three are as one. Yet stay," added the chief. "Go, Amrut Rao, let him have his own chance for life—but remain without."

"Do any of you know the seal of the Wazir of Bijapur," said the Lala, when they were alone, "or do you know the writing of Sivaji, the Mahratta Rajah?" He spoke with difficulty, for his mouth was parched and his lips white.

"Nay, but Sivaji cannot write, Lala. This is some fool's story. Beware, too, how you take the name of my lord the Wazir," said the chief sternly.

"My lord, my lord, with death before me and one chance for life, I cannot lie," returned the Lala. "My hands are tied; but if one of you will open that bag, there will be truth enough found in it to save me. There, Jemadar," he continued, as Gopal Singh opened the bag, "in the side pocket are two Persian letters, fastened up; look at them first; look at the seals. If I am wrong I am wrong—I am helpless, do as you like with me; I am helpless."

"It is the Wazir's private seal, uncle," said Gopal Singh excitedly. "Of this there is no doubt; look at it yourself."

"What have we here? It is the seal truly," said Pahar Singh, looking at the impressions on both letters, and rocking himself to and fro.

"Do any of you read Persian?" asked the Lala. "If so, read for yourselves. I need not speak; they will speak for me."

"I will try, uncle," said Gopal Singh; "give me the letters. By Krishna, father!" he continued, after his

eye had glanced over a few lines, "I would rather go into the thickest fight than read treachery like this."

"May the gods be merciful, Gopala! But what is it?—what is it?" said the chief eagerly.

"He would sell our kingdom of Bijapur to the Emperor of Delhi, uncle——"

"People said so—people said so," said Pahar Singh, interrupting; "but I did not believe it. What more, my son?"

"Nay, the style is too courtly for me to make much of it, but both the letters are to the same effect. Where did you get these letters, Lala?"

"Noble gentlemen, if you are true to your King's salt," exclaimed the Lala, seeing that he had made an impression on his hearers, "then I deserve naught but good at your hands. I am in the royal service; I saw the papers; I read what danger threatened Ali Adil Shah of Bijapur; I took them; I escaped from the camp with them, to carry them to him, and I am here. O noble sirs, put me not to loss and shame!"

On the next few words hung the Lala's life. It would be easy to kill him and secure the papers. The Wazir had sent several urgent messages to Pahar Singh lately. He had a matter of moment, he said, attended with great profit, to communicate. Was it about these letters? The Wazir would give lakhs for them. The very threat of disclosure to the King would extort any terms. Again, if he denied them—and what more easy than to counterfeit his seal, or use it upon forged papers? If he took this course, they would be in a false position: false to the King and to the Wazir,—and the King's threats against Pahar Singh had of late been very menacing. As they deliberated in Kanarese, the Lala's life hung in the balance, and he looked from one to another in piteous supplication, not daring to speak, and trembling in every limb; for he felt this quick discussion, and the savage glances of the chief towards him, to be for life or for death.

4. *Loyalty.*

"And this from Sivaji?" asked Gopal Singh, at length. "What of it, Lala?"

"It was with the others, and there are some more of older date in the bag," he replied, "and of the Wazir's also. Sivaji's letters had to be translated to the Emperor: I had to copy the translations, and thus I came to know their contents. Noble sirs, I am telling no lies; look at the seal. They said in the office it was Sivaji Bhónslé's. I do not know it myself."

"Show this to Amrut Rao," said the chief. "Here," he continued, as the chief scribe advanced, "look at this; what do you make of it?"

Amrut Rao looked at the seal and started. "May I open it?" he said.

"Yes, read it," said the chief.

He read it over slowly twice.

"Well, what is it?" asked his master.

"What Moro Trimmul wrote from Tuljapur—what they asked you, my lord, to join in; and here is your name with five thousand men in figures after it, and the Wazir's with a lakh."

"Is it genuine, think you? that is what we want to know," said Gopal Singh.

"Certainly," replied the scribe; "there is the private mark on the seal, and the signature. That is all the Maharaj can write. No one could forge that, it is too crooked. How did that man get it?"

"He stole it, Amrut Rao," said the chief; "and we are discussing whether he ought to live or to die. What do you think?"

"As a traitor to the salt he has eaten, he ought to die, master," said the scribe, looking at the Lala, who felt that his fate was in the Brahman's hands,—
"but——"

"That is just what I said! he is not fit to live," interrupted the chief. "Let him die. Ho!"

"But"—continued Amrut Rao in Kanarese, persistently interrupting the chief, and waving back Lakhshman, Rama, and others, who were advancing—"if I

may speak. He says he wants to take them to Bijapur. Let him have his own way. A bargain may be made with Ali Adil Shah through his secretary the Mirza—not by him” (and he pointed to the Lala) “but by us. The letters will not alter the matter one jot, and my lord can act as he pleases afterwards. We can send people with the Lala.”

“Excellent! spoken, Amrut Rao; you have all better brains than I have. Then the papers are valuable?” said Pahar Singh.

“Yes, my lord, if properly vouched for; and the man who stole them can give a better account of them than we can. The King might give any money—a lakh of rupees—for them. He already more than suspects the Wazir and Sivaji Bhónslé of being in league with the Emperor, and would rejoice to get such proofs of their treachery.”

“Hark ye, Lala,” cried the chief, “what did you expect to get for these papers? What is the price of them?”

“My lord,” he replied, simpering and putting up his joined hands, “they may be worth lakhs—so the Gosais at Kulliani told me—anything I liked to ask. They will negotiate the matter with the secretary and the King for me; and if my lord would only condescend to help, I—I—would give—yes, he might be sure of a share.”

“I of a share!—of a bribe! Are you feeding me with a bribe? O base dog, and son of a dog! Pig! I a share? O Lala, you are surely mad, and fated to eat dirt. Enough of this! Ho, without!—Lakhshman!—away with him; give him the handkerchief in the outer court. Quick!” roared Pahar Singh, relapsing into fury.

“Uncle! father! not now,” cried Gopal Singh, entreatingly, “calm yourself. Not to-day, when I am safe; not to-day, when I promised him life! Give his life to me for this day; after that, as you will.”

“It is valuable, my lord,” added Amrut Rao. “These papers cannot tell their own story. Where could we say we got them? He must go with them

to prove they are genuine, and Gopal Singh and I will go to the city with him. Give him to us, my lord; we may get good out of him."

"No," said the chief, after a moment's pause. "no, Rao Sahib, I will go myself. I will see the end of this matter. You shall come with me, Maun Singh; and we can work through your brother, Amrut Rao. A lakh, said you, O Lala? Well, I will give you a share if you are true. And now I give your life to you—a free gift—a new life, O Lala. See that you make good use of it, for what I give I can recall. Go: they will see to your food and comfort, and you will eat in a Rajput's house of the race of the Sun."

"The King has been seeking my life, friends, for some time past," said the chief musingly, when the Lala had left the room. "Perhaps it would be well to use these papers—that is——Yes," he continued, "I have eaten his salt—I and my father—and we eat it now. My heart revolts at this treachery, and we can be faithful with many another. Let us rouse the young King. There should be good stuff in Mahmud Adil Shah's son, and I will try it. As for the Wazir, I know what he would have me do, but I will not agree to it, else should we have been left quiet so long, and his army so near us? Stay here, Gopal and Amrut Rao. If the Wazir send for me, go to him at Naldrug; 'tis but a ride. Go and take his money, then come to me at the city. I shall be in the old place; and bring the hunchbacks with you, there may be work for them."

When Lala Tulsi Das had finished his meal, he was summoned to the chief, and it was not without fear that he went; but he was now received kindly, though with a rough sort of civility, and motioned to sit near Gopal Singh. So assured, the Lala's habitual confidence soon returned, and he took his part, with much ability, in the discussion that followed, in which his information in regard to the Emperor's designs was most valuable.

How the consultation ended will hereafter appear in another locality, to which we must now transport our readers.

CHAPTER VIII.

FAZIL, KHAN MAKES A DISCOVERY.

1. *Prayers and Plots.*

The Azan, or evening call to prayer, had just ceased throughout Bijapur; and the busy hum of the city was hushed. It was still light, though the sunset glow, which had rested upon the minarets, domes and gilded pinnacles of the palaces, mosques and mausoleums of the splendid city, was fading fast and giving place to sober grey.

Beside the fountain of a small but beautiful family mosque, two persons were waiting. One was a beautiful girl, evidently of a noble and wealthy family; the other, her old nurse. With the marble mosque and dark trees behind them, they formed a pretty picture—the girl with her foot resting on the raised rim of the fountain, her scarlet dress and white muslin scarf reflected in the trembling water, and the old nurse sitting on the step at her feet.

"Gulab," said the girl at length, "he said he would come to evening prayer. This is the second night he has disappointed me."

"Nay, my soul," replied the woman, "the Azan is but just said, and there is ample time for prayer. Why should you be so impatient? But listen! my young lord comes."

As she spoke the door of the garden court opened, and with a cry of joy Zaina sprang to meet her brother.

"Ah, you are a sad truant, Fazil," she said, greeting him. "But why are you armed more heavily than usual? You have not been in danger, Fazil, my brother?"

"Danger!" cried the youth; "there is always danger in the streets of Bijapur. But trust me, there

is no real danger to me. Come then to prayer, for the light already fails us."

So saying they went up the mosque steps together. Their carpets were already spread, and they at once engaged in the service of the evening.

Fazil Khan and Zaina were the son and daughter of Afzal Khan, one of the great nobles of Bijapur and the trusted adviser of its young King, Ali Adil Shah. He was an Afghan who had, many years before, taken service under the Bijapur Government, and had been consistently loyal to his adopted state. Fazil, now a handsome young man and a fine soldier, and Zaina, a girl of fourteen and reckoned one of the beauties of Bijapur, were the children of his favourite wife, whose death the Khan still deeply mourned. The brother and sister were devoted to each other, and to their father.

"I cannot stay longer, sister," said Fazil Khan, as they came down the steps together to the fountain again. "I have much to do before midnight, and I must go to prepare for it. I will meet you at the evening meal before I start."

"Will our father join us?" asked Zaina.

"I think not," replied her brother. "I left him with the King's Secretary in the Durbar, and he did not speak of return. I will wait a little for him; but if I should not see him, you must tell him, Zaina, that I am gone on the King's business. But hurry the dinner; I go only to give a few orders, and I will be with you again very soon." So saying he left them, and quitted the garden.

Gulab followed to bar the door after him, and, returning to Zaina, said, "Did he tell you what he was going to do, my life?"

"No," said Zaina, sadly; "and I dared not ask him. But he said he would explain by-and-by; and I know he will," she added, clapping her hands; "he always trusts me."

"I only hope he is in none of the plots that they say are going on," replied the nurse.

"What plots, Gulab?" asked Zaina, anxiously.

"O, I know not," answered the old woman, with a puzzled air; "only people in the bazaar say so, and talk about the Mahrattas and Sivaji Bhonslé."

"O, the Kafirs!" cried Zaina, laughing; "I have no fear for him, if that is all. I was afraid of worse. But come, or we shall keep him waiting."

Meanwhile Fazil Khan had reached the large hall in the outer Court where he knew he should find some of his own men. Generally it was filled with the better classes of horse-soldiers—silladars, or cavaliers who rode their own horses, and sat there when not on duty—and with the officers and men of the household force, or *Pāegah*, of his father, Afzal Khan.

Fazil Khan was the idol of his men, both Muslims and Hindus. He was young, strong and handsome, a perfect horse-man, and skilled in the use of spear, sword and gun; and his beauty and frank manner, and generous and affectionate disposition, endeared him to all his father's retainers.

His favourite among these was Balwant Rao Bhonslé, who held rank in the *Pāegah* as a Daffadar. He was a Mahratta of noble family who had joined the service of Afzal Khan years before. An expert swordsman, he had been chosen by the Khan to teach his son the use of the sword; and he had done his work well. Daring and resolute, he had already led Fazil Khan into the midst of some sharp cavalry skirmishes with the Moghuls, and brought him forth safe, while he himself had been wounded several times in protecting him from sword-cuts.

"What has my lord for his servants to perform?" asked Balwant Rao upon Fazil Khan's arrival. "Speak but the word, and we are in our saddles directly."

"Balwant," said the young man, taking him aside: "I want to speak to you privately. Come into the inner court and listen."

Fazil led the way into the inner court. "Go shut the door," he said, "so that we may be safe from interruption."

"In the name of all the gods," said Balwant Rao,

as he returned, "why all this need of caution? Has the Wazir revolted, or what?"

"Silence," returned Fazil, "hear me. In one word, you are a Mahratta—is Tannaji Malúsré known to you?"

The question seemed for an instant to stun the faculties of the hearer. He passed his hand dreamily across his forehead and eyes, and, pausing, seemed to gasp. Fazil thought it might be a sudden dizziness—the consequence of the *ganja* he had been smoking—and was about to ask him, when Balwant Rao spoke.

"Tannaji Malúsré! Meah? Do I know Malúsré? Ay, truly, Khan; as the wild dog and the wolf, as the wild boar and the tiger know each other, so do I know Tannaji Malúsré. The destroyer of my house, the usurper of my possessions, the plunderer of my ancestral wealth. Yes, there is a feud between us which can be washed out only by blood. When I was but a boy, he killed all my family, and nearly killed me too. Look here," and he took off his turban and showed a deep scar on his shaved head; "that is what his sword did."

"Should you know him again, Balwant, if you saw him?" asked Fazil.

"Know him, Meah? Among a thousand—among a thousand. It is years since we met; but, before that quarrel with my father, he came to us often, for he was my mother's relative. Know him? I should know him among a thousand. His eyes, Meah, his eyes! Have you seen them?"

"Nay, I have not seen them yet, Balwant; but I think I know where he is to be found," returned Fazil.

"Here, Meah? in Bijapur? Tannaji Malúsré in the city?"

"Yes, here. You are always rambling about the city at night, and know all the *madad khanas*; can you guide me to one Rama's shop—Rama of Ashti? It is near a Hindu temple."

"I know it, Meah; I know it well. Rama sells the best *ganja* in Bijapur. Yes, I can take you there, but not in those clothes."

"Not now. Let the night wear on a little; they will not be there till just before midnight," replied Fazil; "and we have to watch the temple, too. Is there one near Rama's, with trees about it? Some people meet there first, and then go to Rama's."

"Yes, Meah, there is the temple of Devi, in the plain beyond, among the tamarind trees; a lonely place it is, and fakirs put up there. Yes, I know it."

"Well, I have discovered that Malúsré will be in the temple or in the *madad khana* with a 'Lala.' There is no good, I am sure, at the bottom of this, and we must find out what it is. Bijapur is full of Moghul spies, and this Tannaji is a close friend of Sivaji."

"We must go disguised," said Balwant Rao. "You had better become a Hindu, Meah, for the time. I could paint the marks on your forehead."

"Very good," said Fazil; "I will do anything for the cause of the Shah and the Faith. And now begone. I will come to you here, after the evening meal. Do not say a word of this to anyone."

2. Brother and Sister.

Fazil was as good as his word to his fair sister, and having seen Balwant depart, gained the door which led to the private apartments, and proceeded to that in which he knew he should find her.

Zaina had been there some time, and the sweet freshness of the evening air had tempted her to throw open the lattice window to admit it more freely. Looking out upon what was passing below her, she did not observe her brother's entrance, and almost started as he spoke.

"I did not hear you, brother," she said, rising and making way for him. "Come and sit here, it is so fresh after the rain. What kept you so late? We hear the Durbar was very full to-day, and that there are more rumours of war. O, I pray not, brother?"

"True, sister, there are such rumours," he replied; "but nothing new. The Wazir is at Naldrug with the army. The Emperor's forces lie about Dawlatabad, so there is no change. But I was not in Durbar. I

was looking after some other matters. Come and sit here, Zaina, and I will tell you. See," he continued, as she seated herself by him, "the city looks calm and beautiful, does it not? Yet, who can tell the wild acts now in progress there, and the wild plots which disgrace it? There is no peace in it."

Zaina shuddered, and nestled closer to her brother. "Why is your speech so sad to-night, Fazil?" she said timidly; "does anything threaten us or our friends?"

"I do not know, sister," said Fazil, after a pause; "but I greatly fear that the Wazir is not keeping faith with his king."

"The Wazir? Khan Muhannad?" cried Zaina, in surprise. "Why should he be suspected?"

"Alas, who can say?" replied her brother sadly. "Who can tell to what crimes pride and ambition may not urge a man? Truly, sister, it will not be marvellous if the Wazir, seeing the danger of the Moghuls on the one hand, of Sivaji Bhonslé on the other, and knowing better than we do the divisions among our own nobles, should forget his faith, and try to strike in for himself."

"What! and forget his King, who has raised him from—from——" she could not add slavery; "forget honours, titles, lands, wealth? O brother! But what about his son, your friend?"

"Nay, by your head and eyes, Khawas Khan is pure, Zaina. My own dear friend," he exclaimed, "I would answer for him with my life. As for the rest, 'tis but suspicion as yet. Whatever the matter I know of may lead to, I am resolved to see the last of it."

"And is that why you are going out to-night?" asked Zaina, anxiously.

"Yes," replied her brother. "Last evening I discovered by accident that one of the chief supporters of Sivaji Bhonslé is in Bijapur, and he and some others are to meet to-night in a Hindu temple of Bhavani, in the plain on the east of the fort. There I am going in disguise with Balwant Rao, for I believe papers will be produced about the Wazir."

"Go not, my precious brother," cried Zaina. "There must be danger among these plotters. Remember what you are to us all, Fazil."

"If it were not for my love for Khan Muhammad's son," he replied, "perhaps I would not run the risk. But we owe many favours to the Wazir, and I should hold myself false if I hesitated to risk something in their cause. And if the Wazir is false, I may be able to save our king from his treachery. So I must go."

"Go? whither, son?" said Afzal Khan, whose entrance had not been observed by either; "whither would you go, and for what?"

"Father!" both cried at the same moment and, rising, saluted him reverently.

Afzal Khan, though over fifty years old, was a tall fine-looking man, with a soldierly bearing and commanding presence. With his children, however, whom he loved dearly, his usual somewhat haughty manner was softened.

"Be seated, my children," he said, kindly; "I too will join you."

"Tell him all you have told me, brother," said Zaina.

When Fazil had told his story, his father said, "Go my son; I cannot forbid you. If we can protect Khan Muhammad's house, or if any of these vile plots can be traced to those concerned in them, a few sharp examples may be a warning to others. Take some of the *Pâéqah*; these are dangerous quarters at night."

"Impossible, father. Balwant Rao says there will be spies watching everywhere. So we had better go alone; and with your leave, father, I shall go and prepare myself."

Afzal Khan sat silent, and the beads which he had removed from his wrist were passing rapidly through his fingers, while his lips moved as though in prayer. Zaina dared not speak, yet he looked at her lovingly as his lips still moved, and passing his arm round her, drew her to him. Perhaps with that embrace more tender thoughts came into his heart, some memories that were sad yet grateful.

"There will be no danger, Zaina," he said assuringly as he felt her trembling, and guessed her thoughts; "Fazil and Balwant Rao are both wary. The moon, too, is setting, and it will be dark, perhaps raining. He comes, daughter," continued the Khan, as Fazil's foot was heard on the stairs; "let us look at him."

A Hindu Yogi entered the room, wrapped in his long yellow cloth, and with his caste marks painted in white and red on his forehead. For a moment Zaina shrank back startled and afraid, but she laughed and clapped her hands when her father, laughing too, cried out, "Well done, Fazil! Your disguise is perfect. Even your own father would scarcely know you."

"Give me your blessing, father, before I go," said Fazil, "Balwant Rao is waiting for me in the garden."

"Go," said the Khan, rising, and placing his hands tenderly on his son's head. "Go, and may Allah protect you!"

"*Amin! Amin!*" sighed Zaina, for her heart was with her brother as he turned to go on his dangerous mission.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT FAZIL, KHAN SAW IN THE TEMPLE.

I. *A Strange Yogi.*

Fazil Khan and Balwant Rao made their way rapidly through the city, meeting but few passers-by in the now dark and deserted streets. Presently Balwant Rao pointed.

"That is Rama's shop, across the street there, where you said we should meet Tannaji."

"Ah!" said Fazil. "But first we must go to the temple. Is it far?"

"Not now," replied his companion; "a few more turns down the back lanes yonder, and we shall find it among the tamarind trees on the plain."

Balwant knew the place perfectly. A quiet secluded spot, where one or two Yogis, or Gosais, or Sanyasis of ascetic orders, usually put up, or travellers sometimes going eastwards, who had to be clear of the city before dawn. The grove, too, was a favourite place for encampment, and droves of public carriers halted there in fair weather. Now, however, it was quite vacant, and the natural gloom of the place was deepened by the darkness of the night.

"An evil-looking place, friend, at this hour," said Fazil.

"Ay, it is a strange place to come to at night. Be cautious, Meah, I will look in."

The temple was a small one, upon a low basement; the high conical roof or steeple could hardly be traced among the heavy foliage that enveloped it. There was a court around it, the wall of which was not so high on one side but that a man standing on tiptoe might look over it; and as Fazil was about to do so, Balwant Rao pulled him back.

"For your life, no," he whispered, "some one is

there. I saw the flicker of a fire yonder; come round to the back of the verandah. I know of a hole in the wall which is not filled up."

Fazil followed. His companion was right. A hole had been left in the wall for light or air, and through it both could see plainly what was therein. Three persons were sitting on the floor near the embers of a fire; two wrapped in white sheets, which were drawn over their heads, and partly over their faces; they might be Brahmans, who had been worshipping at the temple. The other was a "Yogi," or ascetic, who, in all his majesty of dirt and ashes—his hair matted and twisted about his head like a turban, the ends of a long grizzly beard tucked over his ears, and naked to the waist—sat cross-legged upon a deer's skin before the embers, which cast a dull and flickering light upon his naked body.

Now and then, with his right hand, he took ashes from the fire and rubbed them over his broad hairy chest and sinewy arms, and over his face, telling his beads the while with his left. None of the men spoke. Could they be the persons of whom they were in search?

"I fear we are wrong, Balwant," whispered Fazil, "these must be Brahmans with that Yogi."

"I know of no other temple. Meah," returned Balwant; "let us watch. These men may be disguised."

The inmates of the little building were silent for some time, and one of them, who had kept his face concealed, at length lay down, and drew his sheet over him. The other two smoked at intervals, now one, now the other, lighting the rude cocoa-nut *hooka* with embers from the fire before them.

At last one spoke in a low voice to the Yogi.

"I had better shut the door, Pahar Singh," he said; "We don't want to be intruded upon."

"Do not bolt it, brother; they will be here soon," replied the Yogi, as the man went and closed it.

"Pahar Singh!" whispered Balwant Rao to the young Khan; "the robber, rebel, murderer, what you please! These are your plotters, right enough."

"Hush!" said Fazil; "they are speaking again. Listen!"

"Are these papers genuine or not, Lalaji?" the Yogi was saying to the man who was lying down.

"My lord," replied Tulsi Das, "these for whom we are waiting will best know that."

"Well, we shall see," said Pahar Singh. "But what if they turn out to be false, and we have been brought so far in vain! O man, think of that!"

"Yes, think of that, Lalaji," added Maun Singh, turning himself round lazily to speak. "Are you not afraid?"

"My lords, I can say no more. I have told you all I can, and the rest is in the hands of those who come," said the Lala humbly. In his heart, however, the man was chuckling secretly. He thought those who were to come would be attended by a retinue, and he meant to watch his opportunity and denounce the robber, who would be seized on the bare mention of his name, while he, Tulsí Dás, would not only get the price of the papers, but, he felt sure, be rewarded for having enticed so wary a robber into a trap. The Lala, therefore, endured the raillery and coarse abuse expended upon him with grim satisfaction.

"He is a cowardly knave, Maun Singh," continued Pahar Singh, laughing heartily. "Ah, how he begged for life! I am not sure that I did right in bringing him here, after all. I think I ought to have sent you, after your ancestors, Lala!"

"I doubt not, valiant sir, that your worship has slain many of the King's enemies," said the Lala, trembling in spite of himself, "and you are pleased to be merry."

"Dog, if you have deceived me, and brought me eighty miles for nothing, to save your miserable life," said Pahar Singh fiercely, "you shall not escape me twice. Hark! what is that at the door?"—for it was now shaken violently; "they are come, Maun Singh. Remember, Lala, I am no Pahar Singh now, or you die on the spot. See what I have for you here," and he showed the shining naked blade of a sword con-

cealed under the ashes. "Enough, don't be frightened, only be discreet. Go, Maun Singh, brother, open the gate quickly,"—for those without again shook it impatiently. "Two are to come, only the two; there might be treachery with more. But Pahar Singh is a match for ten, is he not? Now, see that you speak the truth, O Lala," he continued; "and my vows for the temple, and the well, they are not to be forgotten—nor—the feeding of five thousand Brahmans. Forget not this on your life. I am your Guru, teaching you 'the mysteries.'"

These words came from him, during the brief interval before those he expected arrived; and which he employed in rubbing additional handfuls of ashes upon his face, body, and limbs, so as to make his disguise more complete, and in heaping up ashes on his sword, the hilt of which lay towards him, ready for action. As he finished, he took a string of wooden beads from his hair, and settled himself in an attitude of devotion; for steps were heard advancing, and the Lala, though his heart sank within him at seeing only two persons accompanying Maun Singh, rose as they ascended the steps of the basement and were clearly visible by the light of the fire, which Pahar Singh had caused to burn brightly.

2. *A Traitor's Letters.*

Fazil Khan's heart beat fast as he saw that one of the persons was Mirza Anwar Ali, the King's Secretary, his most trustworthy and confidential servant. His handsome, grave, Persian face, and long grey beard were unmistakable. The other, who had his face partly concealed and who might be taken for an ordinary attendant to the Secretary, seemed nowise remarkable; but, as the pair sat down before him, and this person removed one fold of the scarf about his face, the large sad eyes of the young King were plainly visible.

Fazil beheld him with amazement, and fairly panted with excitement. "If he had known whom he was to meet here," he thought, "he would not have exposed

himself to this risk: Alla and the Prophet have sent us." And the young Khan seemed to swell with the consciousness that his King might owe his safety, nay, even life, to them. The Secretary was a veteran soldier, but he was unarmed, except for a small knife-dagger in his girdle. Fazil, therefore, loosened his sword in its sheath. "Be ready," he whispered to his companion, who pressed his hand silently, in acknowledgment of the caution. Balwant had evidently not recognised the King; indeed, it was well perhaps that he could not see the face, or have his suspicions awakened: he might not have kept as calm as his young master.

After a few minutes silence, Fazil saw the Yogi twitch the sleeve of the Lala's garment as a sign to begin. Tūlsī Dās was disappointed that there seemed to be no chance of betraying the robber-chief; but he felt pretty much at ease. The position and rank of the King's Secretary were sufficient guarantee that business would be done: though who the other person might be he could not guess: perhaps an assistant, or a son. He felt quite sure that Pahar Singh would not give him up, or the papers either, without a large sum of money in exchange.

Such thoughts were passing through the Lala's mind when he felt Pahar Singh twitch his sleeve. He at once joined his hands together and began to address the King's Secretary in courtly Persian phrases of welcome. But the Secretary quickly cut him short.

"Peace, Lalaji!" he said, "we are rougher people here than those from whom you have brought these idle compliments, and you can keep them till you get back. Now to business—do not detain us."

"Ah, yes. My lord desired to see some letters of which I spoke yesterday."

"It is therefore that I have come, and it will be well if they can be produced. You have bargained for them overmuch, good fellow," replied the Secretary, curtly.

"Nay, if my lord regrets," said the Lala, "there is no need to press the matter further. Baba!" he

continued to the pretended Yogi, "you can burn them in the fire there, only perhaps the King——"

"Not so fast, good sir," said the Mirza, speaking more amiably. "I am willing to perform my part of the bargain. Is this the Guru of whom you spoke?"

"Sir, it is," replied the Lala. "A holy man—one unused to the ways of the world, and who travels from shrine to shrine in the performance of sacred vows. He, desiring the welfare of the Shah—may his splendour increase, and live for ever!--sent me to inform you, O fountain of eloquence and discretion! that they were in existence——"

"Peace!" interrupted the Mirza. "Let us get up and depart, Sahib," he said to his companion, "they have no papers; this is but a scheme to raise money."

"Nay, my lords, be not impatient," cried 'Túlsí Dás. "When was business of importance ever well done in a hurry? Behold!" added the Lala, taking up the bag, "here are the papers which the holy father has kept safely for me beneath his deer's hide. Have I your permission to open them, Baba?"

"Open, and be quick," was the short answer of the Yogi.

"Simply then, noble sirs," continued the obsequious Lala, taking some Persian letters out of the bag, "here they are; and if you know the handwriting, the signature, or the seals of Khan Muhaminad, Wazir of Bijapur, you will be able to recognize them. Look at them carefully."

The Mirza received the packet with trembling hands, but he said firmly, "You know the penalty you have incurred if these be forged; and if a slave like you should have dared to question falsely the honour of one so exalted as the Wazir, beware!"

"If there be faith in handwriting and seals," replied the Lala, "I fear not. Open the packet there, and say whether I have death and infamy before me, or life and honour in the King's service, for there is more at stake in this matter than my lord knows of."

The Mirza held the packet irresolutely, as one who

almost feared a knowledge of its contents, and looked for a moment to his companion——

"*Bismilla!*" said the King eagerly, speaking in Persian, "open it; this suspense is intolerable. Do you fear for Khan Muhammad? are you his friend?"

"By the King's salt, no," answered the other. "For good or for evil, *Bismilla!* I open it,"—and he tore the cover hastily.

The heart of Fazil Khan beat so hard that its throbbings seemed painfully audible to himself, and he almost fancied they must be heard by all inside; but he was still, as was also his companion.

As the wax-cloth covers were withdrawn, there appeared several letters in the bundle,—large, and the paper covered with gilding, such as are sent to persons of the most exalted rank only. Most eagerly did the practised eye of the Secretary run over each. One by one he passed them to the King, and Fazil could see that, whatever they were, they caused the deepest expression of interest in both their faces. Suddenly the Mirza came to one which, having examined even more narrowly than the others, he passed on, with a deep sigh, to the King.

It was taken eagerly, and at once opened and read, while the Lala turned from one to the other with an intense expression of curiosity, fear, and hope, blended together.

"Do you know the contents of this letter, Lala?" inquired the King.

"I could say them to you, for I have them by heart, noble sir. I committed them to memory. I will even repeat the letter to you if this worthy Mirza have no objection. I presume," he continued to the Secretary, "that your friend is in the King's confidence as much as yourself."

"Surely," was the reply. "I may say that he is more in it than I am myself, else I had not brought him."

"Enough," said the Lala; "I am satisfied," and he repeated the letter aloud word for word, while the King and his Secretary followed him with their eyes

on the manuscript. Fazil Khan and his companion listened with all their ears. It was a letter from the Wazir to the Moghul Emperor offering to betray the kingdom of Bijapur to him, and giving a list of the Bijapur nobles who were ready to play the traitor and join him.

3. *The King and the Robber.*

"Ay, what need of more?" sighed the young King when the letter was finished. "Enough here—enough to prove the man's treachery, the least deserved that ever the false world saw. Yet, Mirza, there are still many true to the King," he continued, his eye running rapidly over the list. "Afzal Khan, and many of note, are not here, and yet rumour has attacked them also."

"Yes, they are friends," said the Secretary, "but no more, I think."

"Then I have won my reward and my life!" exclaimed the Lala anxiously.

"Your life, surely," replied the Mirza; "but for the reward, we need to make some further scrutiny into those papers ere that can be paid: they must be compared with others in the King's possession. Therefore I will take them with me to-night, and if you will come to me early to-morrow, all will be arranged to your satisfaction."

"But, my lord—noble sirs," cried the Lala, in evident dread, "that was no part of the bargain. Did we not settle——". He could not, however, finish the sentence on account of a rude and decisive interruption.

"I forbid it. I forbid one paper or one of you passing hence this night till the money is paid," said the Yogi, severely.

"And who are you?" demanded the Mirza, haughtily.

"Who am I?" retorted the ruffian. "Who am I? One who has the right, as he has the power, to demand what he seeks." As he spoke he snatched up the heavy sword he had kept hidden, and started to his

feet, as did also his follower. "Stir not!" he exclaimed to the King and Secretary, who had been too much startled to rise; "stir not, or you die on the spot!" Drawing himself up to his majestic height, Pahar Singh laughed scornfully: "Ha, ha, ha! a boy and a pen-man against me! Ha, ha, ha! put up your weapon, Maun Singh; there is no need of it."

"Who are you?" demanded the King, rising notwithstanding the threat, and returning the glance as steadily as it was given.

"It concerns you not," answered Pahar Singh. "Pay me the money promised on those papers—ten thousand good rupees—on this spot, or you pass not hence alive. Brother," he added to Maun Singh, "be ready. They have brought the money, and we must get it."

It was a moment of intense anxiety to Fazil Khan and his companion. A word—a sound from them, and the life of the young King was gone. Fazil could see that, except a small dagger in each of their girdles, the King and his Secretary were unarmed. To rush to them soon enough to be of use, was a thing impossible; they would be dead ere he could strike a blow.

The King saw his danger. There was little use in temporizing, and his thought and action were alike prompt. His own life and his friend's were both at stake; and what did the money signify? Not a feather in the balance. Could his attendants, whom he had left at a distance, even hear of his danger, he must perish ere they could approach him.

"Hold!" he cried, "whoever you are, Yogi. If the Lala says you are to have the money, it will be given. Our bargain was with him."

"And his with me," returned the man. "Give it me;" and as he spoke he advanced close to the King.

"Pay it to him—let him have it," cried the Lala to the King, "and keep back your men if you have any with you, or there will be bloodshed. He is desperate, noble sirs; do not provoke him."

"I would do him no harm," said Pahar Singh to the Secretary, "but it is as well to be certain in case of

treachery ;" and he drew a small dagger from his girdle with his left hand, and held it in an attitude to strike into the King. "Go, if the money is here ; bring it quickly ; but beware of any attempt to rescue him, or you will cause his death. You could not reach me ere I had struck him down. Go then, Mirza Sahib, my friend Maun Singh will bring the bags : he is strong enough."

"Go, friend," said the King, "do as he says. If the people ask questions, say I am safe, and will be with them presently."

"And leave you with him !" said the Mirza anxiously. "I will not stir ; there is peril, and my place is beside you."

"There is no peril if you are true," said Pahar Singh ; "much, if you are false. Go !"

"Go, friend, I will trust him ; his object is money, not my poor life. Go ! I am not afraid of him, nor he of me," said the King.

The Mirza turned silently to go, and descended the step, accompanied by Maun Singh.

"Come," said the latter to the Lala ; "help to carry the bags, good man ; it will save me another journey. Come !"

The Lala followed, and the two remained standing face to face, the young King and the outlaw, looking steadily at each other.

"Afraid of you ?" said Pahar Singh in a low voice, and dropping the arm which had held the dagger uplifted. "Afraid of you ? No, proud boy : he who defied your father's power at its greatest, has little to fear from yours. Ali Adil Shah, did you think that this poor disguise could conceal you ? Yet you are bold and true, and I rejoice that I have had proof of it, for men told me you were a coward—a boy of the zenana—only fit to herd with women. Now you have met the 'Lion of the Hill' bravely," he continued, "and he will turn from you peacefully. Your life has been in my hand—nay, is now in it were I to strike—but I give it to you freely ; promise me mine in return, and swear by your father's spirit that, once gone from this,

you will not turn back, nor suffer any one of thy retinue to do so."

The King started.

"You, Pahar Singh, the Lion of Allund?" he said.

"Even so," returned the chief. "Ha! ha! The man whom your slaves—cowards—tell you they pursue. Aha! they dare not. Pahar Singh is monarch of his own wilds; no royal troops dare to come near them. But keep your own counsel, and now listen. You may need me yet, and I may do you good service. Two thousand good hearts and stout arms, such as your money cannot hire, serve Pahar Singh. Swear to keep faith with me, and I will be true. Had you been a coward, and quailed at the sight of this weapon, I should have been tempted to slay you, Adil Khan, like a dog, for never yet did coward sit on the throne of Bijapur. For what has happened, you have my respect. Enough! remember Pahar Singh, and in two days or less I will send you more tidings, or come myself. Now, silence! I have spoken. Am I free to go, scathless as you are? Your hand upon it, monarch!"

It was frankly given, and the rebel and outlaw, instead of taking it rudely, and as if prompted suddenly by a kindly feeling of reverence for his King, bent his head gently, touched it with his forehead, and kissed it.

"Your hand has touched my lips—put it upon my head, and swear by your father not to harm me," he said, quickly.

"I swear by my father not to harm you, Pahar Singh: only be you henceforth faithful to your King's salt," he replied, as he placed both his hands upon the outlaw's head.

"Enough," returned Pahar Singh, removing them, pressing them again to his forehead, and kissing them reverently; "I will be true to your salt, O King; but speak to no one of me, and wait patiently till I come—I may have news for you. A fakir's rags and a beggar's cry — 'If God gives I will take'—admit me everywhere by night or by day. Wherever you are, in durbar or zenana, whenever you hear it—admit me,

or order me to be confined, and send for me—I shall bawl loudly enough. If I come not in two days, do not doubt me; but stir not in this matter till I arrive—it may be very soon, I cannot say. Now cover your face; they come,” and he resumed his former threatening attitude.

The Mirza, with the two others, came from behind the temple almost as he spoke, and in a few moments had ascended the steps. Maun Singh drew a heavy bag from beneath the scarf which was round his shoulders; but the eye of the robber at once noticed its small size.

“Those are not rupees, Mirza; beware of treachery with me. I have not harmed him,” he exclaimed.

“No, it is gold, holy Baba. Behold!” and he opened the bag, and poured the contents carefully into a little heap on the floor near the fire. “There is more than *he* bargained for,” he continued, pointing to the Lala, “but it does not matter; you are welcome to it”

“Enough,” returned Pahar Singh, “I am satisfied. Go, take your papers, and begone; molest me no more.” And, sitting down on his deer’s hide, he heaped up the gold coins carefully with his left hand, while his right still held the sword.

“And my reward, O Mirza Sahib!” cried the Lala eagerly, as he and the King turned to depart; “you will not abandon me to him.”

“It is there with the rest,” answered the Secretary; “Lalaji, help yourself, we must begone.”

“Nay, but I want it not; only take me away—take me away. I fear him,” cried the man, in a piteous voice, and trembling violently.

“Peace, fool,” exclaimed Pahar Singh, rising and holding him back powerfully. “Peace, I will settle with you!”

CHAPTER X.

THE FIGHT IN THE DRINK-SHOP.

1.—*Lalu Tulsi Das.*

"Shall we follow him? Shall we speak to the King?" Balwant whispered hurriedly, as the King and his Secretary left the temple. "Say quickly, Meah,—we have not a moment to lose."

"No, no! we are better here," replied Fazil. "Let us watch these men; we may find out something more. Listen! they are speaking."

"Ha! Lalaji," Pahar Singh was saying as he looked up with a cruel smile, "do you love gold? Here are ten thousand rupees in gold, my friend; they will just pay me for my trouble in bringing you here."

"But where is my share?" whined the Lala.

"Your share!" roared Pahar Singh, "there is your share!" and he struck him on the face with his clenched fist so that the wretch fell over backwards.

"Dead men tell no tales," said Maun Singh, twisting a handkerchief into a peculiar form and tying a knot at the end of it, as he approached the prostrate Lala.

"Surely, brother, but no blood," said Pahar Singh; "I would not soil my sword with carrion like him."

"He will kill him," whispered Balwant Rao, excitedly; "he is a mean coward, but we cannot stand by and see him murdered."

"No, indeed," the young Khan replied. "Ho, Pahar Singh! Maun Singh!" he shouted. "Stop!"

"*Har, Har, Mahadeo!*" cried his companion at the same moment, and both rushed to the place where the wall seemed lowest; but it was still too high to be reached without a scramble over rough stones, which delayed them longer than they had thought. The top once gained, they leaped into the enclosure with drawn weapons; but as they did so, Fazil saw one man on the top beyond, another climbing up, aided by

his companion. For him and Balwant Rao to rush across the court was the act but of an instant; yet they were too late. The Yogi—Pahar Singh—and his companion had escaped. As he looked, hesitating whether he should leap down and follow, Fazil could just see two figures dimly, running at desperate speed through the trees across the plain.

Balwant Rao was at his side. "Another moment and we should have had both: the gods have protected them; and it is of no use following, Meah," he said.

"No, no, they are gone," returned Fazil; "it is useless to follow: better for us to see after that poor wretch yonder—the villains may have murdered him, after all;" and they hastened to him.

The flickering blaze still playing about the little fire served them with enough light to distinguish the objects by it, and as both entered the place at the same moment, a cry of anger burst from them.

"The villains have been too sure! While we scrambled among those stones they killed him. See, here is an ugly gash, Meah!" said Balwant Rao.

"That would not kill him," said Fazil, stooping to raise up the body—"and he is quite warm. I most fear this cloth about his neck; but look for some water. So now—dash some in his face—his heart beats, too—he lives, Balwant Rao!"

These cheering words restored something like consciousness to the wretch. He opened his eyes and stared into the faces of those who stood over him: then he put his hand to his throat as if it hurt him.

"You are not they," said the Lala huskily, and in a low tone. "Friends, how came you here? Hai, hai!—alas, where is my gold? and where are the robbers who would have killed me? May they be cursed!"

"Perish the gold, meanhearted," cried Fazil; "with your soul hovering betwixt life and death, is your first thought for your gold?"

"I worship your feet, brave Gosai," returned the Lala; "but it was all I had, for which I had risked much. Hai, Hai! it is all gone now, and I am in a

strange place without a friend ; ” and he turned to the wall and sobbed bitterly.

“ We cannot wait, Lala,” said Fazil. “ We will see you safe to a guard-room, and I will have you cared for in the morning ; or you can sleep here if you like.”

“ Ah, leave me not, gentlemen ! I am poor and in great pain,” replied the man. “ My clothes and horse are a long way from here ; how shall I get to them ? Take me with you and I shall live, else he will find me out and kill me — that Pahar Singh.”

Supporting the wounded man between them, the two friends unfastened the door of the courtyard and passed out. The glare and noise of the bazaar seemed only at a short distance, and knowing that a strong guard was placed at night near the end nearest the city, they went to it as directly as they could. A few questions were carelessly asked as to the cause of the wound, and as vaguely answered. A traveller found wounded, who had been robbed, was cause enough to account for his condition.

“ We cannot delay, Lala,” said Balwant, in answer to his cries. “ We have far to go, and the night is passing fast. The clouds, too, are gathering, and the thunder is growling in the distance. Hark ! there will be a storm. Conte, Meah,” he whispered, “ we may miss him whom we seek. See that the man’s wounds are dressed, Daffadar,” he continued aloud to the officer of the guard, “ and let him sleep here.”

Fazil and his companion made their way towards the bazaar rapidly, but before they reached Rama’s shop, Balwant stopped.

“ Wait a minute,” he said. “ I have a plan in my head. I think from bazaar gossip that Tannaji and Pahar Singh are in league, and that they have met at Túlápúr at the temple, or at that old villain Basant Gir’s, at whose place Tannaji’s people put up, or that they have corresponded with each other through him. It is not long since I was there—about two months ago. And now I have seen Pahar Singh, I am sure it was he that came one day and consulted the old Gosai. Now if Tannaji has not been there, I can pretend to be

Púran Gir, the disciple of Basant Gir, and we may find out more of this plot. But you keep silence—I will say you have taken a vow of silence for a year. If they hear you speak, they will know you are no Mahratta.”

“A good plan,” replied Fazil, “Let us go.” It was but a few steps. As they moved toward the shop, a low cough came from a man who was sitting near muffled up in a cloak, and a light streamed from the doorway as Rama, the drink-seller, moved in.

“Did you see that, Meah?” whispered Balwant. “They are on the watch. Keep your sword ready.”

2. *Tannaji Malúsré.*

So saying, they stepped into the porch of the shop—an open space, around which were benches of raised earth or brick, neatly plastered over. A table with some brass measures and a large copper vase, brightly polished, containing spirit, stood at one side, and a lamp burned in a niche.

Balwant took one of the brass drinking-cups and rattled it against another as a signal; for, as he supposed, the owner of the place had gone to an inside room. As he came forth, Balwant spoke to him, and requested that two *hookas* be filled—one with tobacco, the other with *ganja*, and was advancing to the inner room when the man stopped him.

“There are no *hookas* to be had here to-night; it is past the hour, Babaji,” he said, “and I am out of *ganja* till to-morrow. Nor can you go in there, for the place is engaged; and they who are within will not be disturbed.”

“Whose dog am I that I should go out into the rain?” said Balwant, angrily. “Is this a night to turn two holy men into the streets? Here we remain, and as to those here before us, we should not disturb them; and if they do not let us alone, we have weapons and can defend ourselves.” Balwant spoke loudly, so that he could be heard by the men within.

“What noise is that?” suddenly asked a strange

voice from behind a partition close to which they were sitting. "Did I not tell you, Rama, to admit no one?"

"May I be your sacrifice, Rao Sahib," returned the drink-seller, joining his hands together, and advancing to the door of the room, "your slave desired these two Gosais to depart civilly, but they will not move. When I told them to be gone, one fellow talked about his weapons, and I believe they are drunk."

"About weapons, did he, Rama? and who are you, mad youth, who venture here into the privacy of gentlemen?" said a tall man, who now advanced from behind the partition with a sword in his hand.

How the stern tones of his voice thrilled the heart of Balwant Rao, as he listened to them after an interval of many years! There could be no doubt he was in Malúsré's presence. The same grave, determined manner—the same large black eye—the same deep-toned voice.

"A poor Gosai," answered Balwant in the Mahratta tongue, but in a tone as haughty as that in which he had been addressed, "who, with his brother, has sought shelter here and refreshment. Why should you interfere?"

"Ha! a proud speech, young sir; and your companion, why does he not answer?" returned Malúsré.

"He has a vow of silence for a year, made at the shrine of our Mother of Tuljapur," returned Balwant, doggedly.

"Enough," cried Malúsré, "begone in her name! There is a temple of hers a gunshot from here; begone to it."

"We must know who has the power to send us hence," retorted Balwant, rising, and raising his fine figure to its full height. Fazil Khan followed his example, ready to meet any sudden assault. "Are we men or dogs, to be put out with insult from a public place in such weather?"

Tannaji's sword was drawn in an instant, and flashed brightly in the flickering glare of the lamp. The others were as rapidly unsheathed; but both parties stood on the defensive,—neither struck.

"For the love of Bhavani, by your fathers' heads! no blood-shedding here, good sirs!" cried the keeper of the shop.

Hearing his cries, two men rushed from the inner apartment with drawn weapons, and would have attacked the others at once, but Tannaji restrained them.

"Peace!" he cried, "put down your weapons, friends. Peace, bold youth!" he continued to Balwant Rao; "you have run a fearful risk unmoved, which you do not know of. Who are you?" he asked rapidly.

"A Gosai: I have said it already," replied the other.

"A disciple of what teacher?"

"How are you to know, even if I tell it truly, who my Guru is?" returned Balwant. "Is Basant Gir of Tuljapur known to you?"

"Ha! Basant Gir of Tuljapur? but his disciple is Puran Gir, not you?"

"Maharaj, it is true; but I am the younger. Puran Gir stays with the Guru."

"And your name?"

"As-Gir."

"When were you made a disciple?"

"About a year ago."

"And what has brought you here?"

"I do not answer questions except upon the Guru's business," replied Balwant haughtily.

"Good, you are discreet, O Babaji! And your companion?"

"He is a novitiate under a vow of silence for a year."

"Good. Let there be peace between us for a while, till I prove you true or false. If you are Puran Gir's disciple, you know Pahar Singh?"

"I know him," said Balwant; "he is here."

"Where?"

"He was in the temple of Bhavani behind there less than half an hour ago, for I spoke to him."

"You? why?"

"I had a message from the Guru for him."

"And where is he now?"

"Nay, how should I know? I saw him there with one Maun Singh, and another, whom I knew not."

"Strange that he should not have come," continued Malúsré, after a pause. "Are you sure of the man?"

"Yes. He may be still at the temple," said Balwant, hoping to get rid of one of the men. "Why not send for him?"

"A good thought," said Malúsré. "Go at once, Abaji," he added to the smaller of the two men. "Here is my blanket—the rain will not matter, and take one of the men with you."

As Malúsré turned slightly to speak the last words, a look of intelligence passed between Fazil and Balwant; but though the odds against them had been withdrawn, Malúsré's suspicions had apparently not relaxed in the least, for he stood, his weapon ready for action, and his shield advanced before his body, so that Balwant had as yet no opportunity to strike as he desired. His account of himself was plausible enough, but it did not apparently satisfy the wily Mahratta.

"And Pahar Singh was there, Baba?" he asked, "know you for certain? What message had you to him?"

"Nay, it was easy enough, Maharaj," returned Balwant; "all my Guru told me was to meet Pahar Singh at the temple of Bhavani this night, and afterwards to come to Rama's shop near the temple, where I should find some Mahrattas who would give me a message."

"Then listen," said Malúsré, for once thrown off his guard, and now leaning upon his sword. "I believe this tale could not have been invented, for no one knows but the Guru, why Pahar Singh would venture to Bijapur, and what need he had to bring me here. I do not care to see Pahar Singh, who is a stupid ruffian; but if you will deliver my message to Basant Gir in four days, it may save trouble to many people, and help what we have in hand. Tell him if he can get the Lala's papers, to keep them; if Pahar Singh has them, to make him keep them till Khan Muhammad can redeem them. They will be worth thousands—

lakhs, perhaps, if they are what I think. Tell the Guru that Sivaji Bhónslé will not be unmindful of his care in this matter; say also that Pahar Singh has disappointed me, and it is better the message went through you; for who can trust one who has a double face, and who is with the King to-day, Sivaji the next, Alamgir the day after—fickle and covetous, looking only after gold. Yet, if he please to meet me, he knows the place and the time. Have you understood all this?"

"Fully; but your name? You may be an impostor. Whom shall I tell him I met at this place, and whose message am I to believe?"

"He did not tell you? He was afraid, perhaps, my name should be heard in Bijapur; but I laugh at such precautions. Say that the servant of Sivaji Bhónslé—one Tannaji Malúsré—bids you say what I have told you."

"And I, villain and murderer! am Balwant Rao of Sewni," he shouted, no longer able to control himself, and assaulting his hereditary enemy with all his force. "Upon them, Meah, in the name of the King! *Har, Har! Mahadeo!*"

It was well for Malúsré that the point of Balwant's sword caught a rafter of the low roof as it descended, or he would never have spoken more. Nevertheless it reached him; and though a steel chain had been woven into his turban, which prevented a severe wound, the force of the blow somewhat stunned him; and so fierce and unexpected was the assault, that for an instant his habitual presence of mind failed him. But for an instant only. Before Balwant could repeat the blow, Malúsré had leaped aside, and began to press his impetuous adversary very closely. Fazil, in his turn, had attacked the companion of Malúsré, and found him a wary swordsman; and the place, confined as it was, gave no room for rapid movement; while the light was dim and treacherous. Blows were, however, rapidly exchanged. The quarrel could not continue long: for the shouts and cries of the keeper of the house, and of several of Malúsré's scouts, who were unarmed, aroused

the guard, who rushed to the spot with loud shouts and drawn weapons.

Tannaji felt in an instant that he had no chance if they entered, and he knew that if taken his execution would be immediate and certain. Just, therefore, as the dark figure of the foremost of the guard was entering the shop behind Balwant, and by whose rapid tread and shouts he was somewhat thrown off his guard, Tannaji gathered himself up for a desperate blow, and delivered it with a curse. "Once I failed," he said—"not now!" As he spoke, the heavy weapon descended with all his great strength; Balwant tried to stop it, but it caught the edge, not the face of the shield, and glancing from its hard and polished surface, it lighted upon Balwant's bare neck and shoulder, cutting down to the bone in a ghastly manner.

Malúsré saw with exultation that the blood poured forth in a torrent, and, as Balwant staggered and fell back, he called to his companion to follow him, and both darted through the back apartments into a court leading into a narrow street beyond, and as they passed they closed both the doors behind them.

"Follow me!—a thousand rupees for Tannaji Malúsré's head!" cried Fazil to the guard; but though they pursued him for a short distance, all chance of capturing him was hopeless in that murky darkness and heavy rain.

When Fazil Khan returned, he found the drink-seller's shop filled with the armed men of the guard. A barber had been sent for, and he was dressing the wound of Balwant Rao, who lay on the ground, very faint from loss of blood. Fazil dropped on his knees beside his friend and anxiously inquired how he felt.

"Not dead yet, Meah," said Balwant, with a faint smile. "Thank God you are unhurt! Did he escape?"

"Yes, for the present," Fazil replied.

CHAPTER XI.

AFZAL, KHAN IS ANXIOUS.

I.—*A night-watch.*

That night Afzal Khan could not sleep. He was anxious about his son, and was still more anxious about the political affairs of the kingdom. He therefore remained in the room where Fazil had left him and Zaina, and busied himself with a pile of Persian papers which the King had that day given him to look over. Zaina was equally wakeful, and had begged to be allowed to remain with her father to wait for her brother's return.

At midnight Zaina fell asleep; and as her father watched her peacefully slumbering, his thoughts went back to her mother, his first and favourite wife, and the days when he was young and happy, and Bijapur was a prosperous and united kingdom.

Those bright days were long past. The present was dark, uncertain and threatening. As he looked out of the window, the night outside seemed to Afzal Khan a type of what was coming. The city beneath him was dark and still. Over the sky dark clouds were hurrying along. In the west, the horizon was black and threatening, and the edges of a heavy bank of cloud were lit up every now and then with flashes of lightning. One of the night storms of the season was evidently approaching.

The papers he had been reading had been discussed that day by the King, his Secretary and himself. They were reports from the governors of the west and north-west provinces. All of them spoke of the spirit of rebellion that was spreading among the people of the mountain valleys, supposed to be due to the plots of Sivaji Bhónslé. Sivaji still pretended to be a loyal subject of Bijapur, but he was believed to be planning

mischievous and to be in communication with the Moghul Emperor, Aurangzeb.

Afzal Khan knew that there was a strong Moghul party in the city. So long as the Moghul army was actually besieging Bijapur, men of all parties and all creeds had united, well knowing how the city would be plundered if it was taken by storm. Aurangzeb had therefore cunningly raised the siege and withdrawn his army to a distance, where it lay apparently inactive. But his agents were busy in the city, winning over courtiers and others with money, promises of rank, and assurances of protection. Afzal Khan himself had been approached; but he remained absolutely loyal to his young king.

With the most powerful man in the kingdom, however, Aurangzeb's agents had apparently been more successful. Khan Muhammad, the Wazir, had for many years been a personal friend of Afzal Khan, and the two had fought side by side for Bijapur on many a battlefield. There had been a good deal of talk, too, of uniting the two families by a marriage between the Wazir's son, Khawas Khan, and the Khan's daughter. But of late Afzal Khan had begun to doubt his old friend's loyalty. He had nothing definite against him, but there were ugly rumours that made him uneasy; and he had fancied, too, that the Wazir was becoming cold in his manner towards him. It was certain that if the Wazir turned traitor, he would find in Afzal Khan, with his fiery temper and habit of prompt action, a bitter and powerful enemy.

It was not merely, then, anxiety about his son's personal safety that disturbed Afzal Khan that night, but the fear that he would come back with proofs of his old friend's treachery. There was reason enough for his depression of spirit—the Moghul army threatening the city, Sivaji plotting rebellion, Bijapur full of disloyalty and sedition, the Wazir himself perhaps preparing to desert to the enemy, and the king young, inexperienced and untried.

The storm had broken. The thunder was rolling overhead and the rain was falling heavily. Suddenly

Zaina started up from her sleep with a cry. "Fazil!" she said. "O father, I dreamed I saw him lying dead before me; and I was afraid, and screamed out."

"Be calm, Zaina," said her father, tenderly. "You have been much excited, and no wonder an evil dream came to you. Fear not, he is safe, and I am with you."

"Safe, father? Has he come back?"

"Not yet, but he will come soon. He is no doubt sheltering somewhere from the storm."

"I will watch now, father," said Zaina. "You have not slept at all. Lie down, and I will wait for Fazil."

"Yes, I will try to rest a little; for my head is weary. If Fazil does not come before the morning, I will take some of the men, and go and find him." So saying, he lay down and at once fell asleep.

Zaina sat beside her father, now and then trimming the lamp, and wondering much at Fazil's strange absence. At last, just as the dawn was breaking, she heard the sound of voices at the gate; and soon after a servant came into the room to say that a messenger was at the gate who had news of the young Khan. She at once woke her father, and he, in his eagerness for news, hurried down to the gate, where he found a young man talking to the sentinel.

"Who are you?" cried the Khan, "and what news do you bring of my son?"

"I am Ashraf, son of Pir Muhammad Daffadar," replied the youth, salaaming deeply; "Meah Sahib sent me to say that he is safe."

"Praise be to God!" cried the old man, fervently; and so said his retainers who came crowding round from all parts of the courtyard. "But why has he not come himself?"

"There was a fight," said the youth, "and Meah Sahib's companion was wounded. He is staying with him, and sent me for a palankin."

"A fight?" cried the Khan; "tell me all you know!"

When the Khan had heard the story, he turned to his men.

"Some twenty of you get ready at once, and call up the spearmen; the palankin and the bearers, too, for

Balwant Rao. We could ill spare him, poor fellow, from among us. Keep the boy, he must go with us."

So saying he turned back into the private court in order to seek his daughter. But Gulab had already told her the good news, and she met him with glad eyes and a thankful heart. "Blessed be God he is safe!" she cried.

2.—*A Morning Ride.*

The Khan's horse awaited him in the outer court, and with it a strong troop of his best horsemen, and a company of spearmen.

The gates were at once thrown open, and Afzal Khan and his retainers rode out at a rapid pace. It was now broad daylight. The young Ashraf ran quickly along before the party, leading them by narrow lanes and streets to the guard-house, where Fazil was waiting.

As his father leapt from his horse, Fazil sprang forward to embrace him, and led him into the room where Balwant Rao was lying. When the room had been cleared of strangers, Afzal Khan began to ask about the fight. Balwant Rao, weakened by loss of blood, was lying asleep. But the Khan's voice acted on him like a charm; he opened his eyes, and raising himself up feebly, said,

"He is not in fault, my lord," pointing to Fazil, "he will tell you all that happened, and how I got my death blow."

"Not so, brave Balwant," said the Khan, cheerfully; "there is no fear for you. You are weak, and your sight fails you. But keep a good heart, friend; you will strike many a blow yet for Afzal Khan; a few days' rest, and this trouble will be forgotten."

"Has he told you all?" asked Balwant.

"Not yet, not yet, friend; but I shall hear it ere long."

"Track him, track him, my lord," continued Balwant; "Malúsré cannot be gone far. He is even now in the city, at one of the Serais. He could not escape if the gates were watched. He might even be found at——"

But speech suddenly failed the poor fellow, and, exhausted with his effort, he sank back, fainting, on the pillow.

"What did he say, son?" asked the Khan, quickly; "what of Tannaji Malúsré, the friend of Sivaji Bhónslé?"

"Even so, father," replied Fazil, "I did not mention him, as there were so many listeners, and the matter was for your private ear; but, as Balwant has said it, no matter now. Would that we knew his haunts! Perhaps he knows, but he is too exhausted to speak."

"Tannaji Malúsré here!—in Bijapur!" exclaimed the Khan, "and has done this deed! The gates shall be well guarded. Ho, without there! One of you ride to each gate of the city—tell those on guard there, that Malúsré has been seen within the city last night, and all that pass out are to be well looked to. Do you hear?"

"*Jo Hukm*," cried a number of the men, and dashed away to the different city gates.

"And now change your dress, son," continued his father; "this disguise is no longer necessary."

"Then follow me, father, into this room," replied Fazil; "I have much to say to you alone."

"I dare not have spoken to you, my son," said the old Khan, "before those people, though I was burning to do so. So you have really discovered something by the night's adventure. This Tannaji.—what of him? Tell me quickly!"

"Alas! father," returned the young man sadly, "I know so much, and of such weighty matters, that my soul trembles under them. I almost wish that I had not gone out last night, or that other lips than mine had to tell you a tale of treachery and wrong-doing."

"Son! I see it in your face. The Wazir!" exclaimed the Khan, starting.

"He is false, father,—false," continued Fazil.

"Ah, I feared so; but speak, boy. How is it? Who told you?" cried Afzal Khan, impatiently.

"I need not say more to confirm it than that the King knows it," returned Fazil; "and that he has

papers now in his possession which leave no doubt of Khan Muhammad's treachery; Mirza Anwar Ali and the Shah took them last night, and paid for them."

"And where was this? By the Prophet, tell me, Fazil! My soul eats your words! speak, boy, quickly."

Fazil then rapidly sketched the scene in the temple, while the old Khan listened in silent amazement.

"Wonderful! and has all this been so easily found out?" he exclaimed. "Ah, Khan Muhammad! often has your poor friend warned you—but in vain. Now you are lost, alas, alas! and all for that insane ambition of yours."

"We must save him, father!" cried Fazil; "he must not perish. At the risk of my own life I would do anything possible to avert the danger which threatens him. What can we do? Implore the King to spare the ancient friend of his house? or write and warn him? Ah, father, you are his most valued friend, and his son is as a brother to me!"

"No, Fazil," said the Khan, "we can do nothing to save the Wazir. If the Shah acts as firmly as I should if I were in his place, Khan Muhammad should die. If we interfere, we ourselves will be suspected by the King. All we can do is to try to save his son, Khawas Khan. As soon as we have taken Balwant Rao home you must go to your friend and warn him. He is in great danger; but if he submits at once to the King, he may yet be saved."

"Perhaps you are right," said Fazil, sadly. "But we must not forget this Lala. It is important, I think, that we should keep our eye upon him. His wound was a mere scratch, and he may be able to ride. Let us send for him."

"Yes, that is a good idea, Fazil. The Lala knows too much; and if we do not take care of him, he may get into the hands of the Wazir's party."

Lala Tulsi Das was quickly brought. He seemed to have recovered from his wound and his fright. When he saw the Khan and his son, he bowed his head very low.

"I trust you are better now," said Fazil, kindly.

"You certainly look better than you did last night, when my friend and I rescued you from the robbers."

"You, my lord?" cried the Lala in astonishment. "I was rescued by two Hindu *gosais*, and you are a Muslim nobleman, by your dress!"

"Very true," said Fazil. "Now, look at me carefully, and try if you cannot remember me as one who lifted you up after you had been robbed."

"Ah, yes, noble sir, now I do remember," cried the Lala; "I owe my life to you, sir, my life. When I screamed, you must have heard me. I pray you, let me kiss your feet."

The action was an ordinary one of gratitude, but the old Khan cried grimly—

"Make your reverence to your God, if you have one, not to my son. Is he an idol, that you bow down to him?"

"I mean no offence; pardon me, my lord," said the Lala, humbly.

When it had been explained to him that he was to go with Fazil and his father Tulsi Das was pleased. He had passed an anxious night in the guard-house, not knowing what was to be done with him; and he was relieved to find himself in the hands of his rescuer, who treated him kindly.

"And now," said the Khan, returning to the room where the wounded man lay, "we must get Balwant Rao away."

CHAPTER XII.

THE KING TAKES COUNSEL.

I. *A Midnight Council.*

The Palace of the Seven Stories still exists as one of the most noble and picturesque ruins of the Fort of Bijapur. Of the Seven Stories, only five now remain; the two upper have been destroyed, perhaps by lightning, or have fallen from decay and disrepair; and it is only in the third that the remains of the beautiful chamber still existing there convey an idea of the effect of the whole structure when it was perfect. Even this has been much damaged. The gilding of the walls, of the arches and fretted roof, has all been scraped off, and the fresco paintings are so destroyed by exposure, that but little exists to tell the history of the beautiful Bhagiratti, the mistress of the monarch who built the palace for her.

At the period of our tale all these were perfect. The King's apartment opened to the west, and overlooked the city which spread away to the west and south. Like Afzal Khan, about the same time, the King sat looking out into the night. The storm had died away, and the night was clear and fresh; and the perfume of sweet-scented flowers came up from the garden below. A silver lamp stood in a sheltered recess, and near the window a rich, soft Persian carpet was spread, on which the King reclined. The carpet was strewn with papers, some Persian and some Mahratta, which he had been looking over. When they returned from the temple, the King and his Secretary had examined the papers they had obtained, and they proved to be far more important than even the Lala had imagined.

The dates of the letters extended over several years. Some had evidently been sent secretly, for they were rolled up into the smallest possible compass. The

handwriting was disguised, and several were written in cypher ; but the most recent were not disguised at all, and the seals were perfect. The whole formed a series, and they had hastily put them together.

Of the Mahratta documents, however, they could form no opinion, as neither could read the character. The King had therefore sent his Secretary for a trusted Hindu adviser who could read these documents ; and was now waiting for his return.

The events of the night had aroused unusual energy in the young King. Nothing since his accession to the throne had excited him like the discovery of treason in the man he had most trusted—his prime minister Khan Muhammad. It was so unprovoked, so undeserved. Early in life, great ability and aptitude for business had been noticed in the Abyssinian slave Rehân, by the late King ; and he had risen rapidly to rank and wealth. Finally he had reached the rank of prime minister or Wazir, and, amidst all the distractions and intrigues of faction, had succeeded in preserving his monarch's attachment.

Influenced by personal esteem, and even affection for the man who had been his father's most trusted counsellor and friend, Ali Adil Shah had retained Khan Muhammad in office, notwithstanding the evil reports of his Dekhan officers ; and in these circumstances the distress of the young King at the discovery of such treachery was hard to endure. It was his first bitter lesson in life, and there were few to fall back upon for advice or consolation.

In his extremity, his thoughts had turned to Afzal Khan first, perhaps, of all. But his known intimacy with the Wazir ; the report that the families would soon be united by the marriage of Khan Muhammad's son to the old Khan's daughter ; the friendship of the young men ; and, above all, a certain reticence in Afzal Khan's expressions whenever the Wazir's character or actions were discussed—recurred to the King, and his thoughts turned from Afzal Khan to others in succession, yet finding rest nowhere.

Of all his officers, on whom could he depend ?

The heavy curtain was pushed aside, and three persons entered the room, bowing low to the King. One was his Secretary, and the other two the confidential advisers for whom he had sent. One of these was Pir Dastgir Khaderi, a holy Said or descendant of the prophet, and head of a religious order of Dervishes. He was much respected for his piety, and was the young King's religious instructor. He was shrewd, well-educated, and absolutely loyal to the royal house. The other was an old Brahman, Nilkant Rai Pansé, who had begun life as a humble clerk in the revenue department of the State, and had served three generations of its Kings. He had risen to the rank of Finance Minister, and though a Hindu was beloved and respected by his sovereign, and consulted especially with regard to the Hindu subjects of the State.

After they had made their *salaams* and, at the King's command, seated themselves before him, Ali Adil Shah spoke :

"I have called you, Nilkant Rai," he said, "to read to me some papers which have come into my possession. There is no one from whom I can expect truer fidelity. Give him the papers, Mirza."

"May my lord's favour and condescension increase," returned the old man, bowing humbly. "I have never deceived the State, and am too old to begin; and as the grandson is now, so were the father and grandfather always towards me; true confidence is rarely disappointed."

The King sighed. "Alas," he said, "would it were so! Read and judge for yourself."

Nilkant Rai fumbled in his pockets for his spectacles, which finally were found in a fold of his turban, put them on, and looked first at the end of the paper.

"The letters are from Sivaji Bhónslé, my lord. Doubtless some renewal of his former excesses, and his usual apologies for them. Shall I read them?"

"If that were all, Nilkant Rai, we could forgive them," replied the King; "but read; we may perhaps

be in error about them, though truly our vassal grows in power, and heeds not warnings or advice."

Nilkant Rai proceeded. He had been deceived by the address, which was that usually written to his own sovereign, and had read the letter through unsuspectingly; but when he realised that it was addressed to the Moghul Emperor, he stopped suddenly.

"It is not fit for my lord to hear," he said excitedly. "This is treason!"

"Be not afraid, Nilkant Rai; we would know the worst," replied the King.

"As you will," returned the old man, bowing to the King; "your servant is not responsible for what is written, and you must be patient with it;" and he read and translated as he went on.

The letter was a clear proof of Sivaji's treason. Although he was a vassal of Bijapur, he had written to the Moghul Emperor offering his help against his own King in return for confirmation of his ancestral rights. Letter after letter was read, all much to the same purpose.

"Enough," cried the King at last. "His treason is clear. What do you advise, Nilkant Rai?"

"I have little to say, my lord," replied the old man. "If you gird up your loins to fight Sivaji, your best troops will be taken into his mountains, leaving their places empty for the Moghuls to occupy, and that were a dangerous risk. No! send your royal pardon to the Bhónslé—invite him here—ennoble him—and you will secure him. If a time of trial should ever come, which may the gods avert, the old Brahman's words and cautions for the adoption of a merciful policy will not be forgotten. May I depart?"

"What has passed here is secret, Nilkant Rai," said the King. "You may go; we will send for you again," and with a deep reverence the old man retreated a few paces backwards, then turned, and passed out of the chamber.

"My prince," cried Pir Dastgir, when the Brahman had gone, "do not listen to his advice. His counsel,

it seems to me, was cowardly and dangerous. How say you, Mirza Sahib ?”

“My opinion would be little worth,” said the Secretary, “even did my lord desire it, and there are others more capable of judging of the power of this Mahratta than I am. What you have to advise our master upon is another matter, Said.”

“Explain it to him, Mirza,” said the King, sadly : “I am sick of treachery, which seems to be closing round me like a net on all sides.”

“God and the Prophet forbid !” exclaimed both in a breath. “Treachery known is soon disposed of. That which sits crouching in hidden places is alone to be dreaded,” continued the Said.

“Nay, read and judge for yourself,” said the King. “Give him the letters, Mirza.”

The Secretary silently handed the treasonable letters of the Wazir to the Pir, who took them, and after examining the seals carefully, began to read them. His face became very grave and stern as he read.

“It is finished, my lord,” said the Said, looking up at last ; and as he spoke, the cry of the *Muazzin* of the Royal Mosque arose in the invitation to morning prayer, sonorous and musical. “It is finished,” he continued, “and it is the will of God that morning prayer should come with the last words. Come, my lord, let us do this service, and ask a blessing on our deliberation. Come to the terrace in the fresh morning air.”

2. *The Fakir.*

As they returned after the prayers, and seated themselves again by the window, the first blush of dawn was stealing over the sky, paling the stars, and the gentle breeze of morning rustled softly among the leaves of the gardens below. The ceremony he had performed, the ablution, and the air of the terrace outside, had refreshed the King after this weary night.

“Speak, Said,” he said, as they resumed their seats. “What is it to be ?”

“I need not, my lord,” replied the Said. “What

God has put into your heart I now see in your eyes, and so be it! *Amin! amin! amin!* It is his destiny. He is not fit to live; let him die, perjured and faithless as he is. But hark! what is that?"

"*If God give I will take! If God give I will take!*" was suddenly shouted in an outer court of the palace by a powerful voice, interrupting the priest for a moment.

"Listen!" he continued, grasping the Mirza's arm. "What is that cry, so strange, and so early?"

"It is but one of the city beggars," said the King, looking across to his Secretary with a glance of intelligence, "who perhaps has not slept off his night's potions. One of your own disciples, perhaps, Said."

"If he be one of my men," said the Said, "he shall be punished. And now, my lord, have I permission to depart? Delay not in this matter; and may God give you a safe deliverance from a traitor!"

"You may go, Mir Sahib," said the King; "and we thank you for this visit; but shall need you at noon."

"Your servant will be present without fail," returned the Said, humbly. "Would that his power were equal to his devotion in the King's service!"

"Return directly," said the King, in a whisper, to his Secretary, as the holy man waddled slowly to the door. "I know who it is; bring him here at once. Have you forgotten the *Yogi* of the temple?"

"Here? that fearful man!"

"Yes, and at once—any excuse—say he does exorcism—anything."

The Secretary hesitated.

"At once," continued the King, positively, "and without fail. I feared him not then, when I was in his power and helpless, neither do I now. Go, take this with you" and he slipped his signet ring into the Mirza's hand.

"I will have him searched at any rate," thought the Mirza, as he descended the narrow stair. "Take care, Mir Sahib, the light is uncertain. Ah, here we are. Who is that, Abdulla, that was crying out?" he

said to a soldier, who kept guard at the foot of the stairs.

"I know not, my lord. He is some drunken Fakir, no doubt; and they have tied him up, I hear."

"He may be wanted above," whispered the Mirza. "Let him follow me, and without notice or hindrance. Some exorcism is needed—you understand—with-in——"

The man stared, and only bowed assent over his crossed arms. Who dared question royal secrets?

"Coming, Mir Sahib; I only looked for my shoes," cried the Mirza to his companion, who had advanced a few paces.

Hearing the Secretary's voice, several persons emerged from the guard-room, holding the Fakir tightly. His face was distinctly seen in the morning light, and there could be no mistake.

"He is not one of my children," said the Said, blandly, looking at the man, and seating himself in his palankin, which had been brought up; "some drunken brawler, no doubt, who deserves a whipping. Send him to the *Kótwal*, my sons. I am departing, Mirza Sahib."

"God be with you!" returned the Secretary. "At noon, you remember!"

"Of course, Mirza Sahib, the royal commands are on my head and eyes. Go on, my sons," and the bearers shuffled along at their usual pace.

"Thank God!" muttered the Secretary, who had doubts of the priest, as he had of most others. "Who are you, fellow?" he added to the prisoner.

"Bid them loose me," said Pahar Singh, for it was he, "and I will tell you. Have you forgotten so quickly?"

"Loose him, my friends; he is an exorcist, and there has been some trouble within," replied the Secretary. "I must take him into the presence. He has no arms? Behold the royal seal."

"I have the amulet which shall restore health to the sick," growled the pretended Fakir; "it is sorely needed, and time presses."

"Come ; I will lead you in," said the Secretary, taking his hand.

When they reached the terrace, the Mirza stepped forward and drew aside the curtain.

"He is come, my lord," he said in a low tone, "he—the robber."

"I thought so," replied the King ; "bring him in."

As Pahar Singh entered, the light of the lamp shone full on him, and revealed his haggard anxious face. His large eyes were gleaming wildly from among the heavy masses of his matted hair, now hanging about his shoulders ; but the disguise of a Muhammadan mendicant was as complete as that of the Hindu *Yogi* had been. He made no lowly reverence, but advanced boldly—defiantly as it were—to the edge of the carpet, and the King involuntarily grasped the hilt of the short sword lying beside him.

"The King might kill me," said the man, observing the action ; "a word, and the head of Pahar Singh is struck from his body by those soldiers yonder. Yet I have trusted you, O King, and do not fear you, even as you did not fear me. I am here, true to your salt ; and what I have to tell you is as true as I am."

"Fear not," said the King, "and speak freely ; you are safe here."

"I believe you, Adil Khan," said Pahar Singh. "Now, listen : time is short, and much has to be done. Khan Muhammad was at Almella yesterday, and is on his way here now. What brings him, think you ?"

"I sent him a letter of assurance, and he believes it," said the King.

"Believes it, King ? He ?" exclaimed the man derisively. "He ? you are but a simple boy to think so. No, he has understood it rightly, and in reply has brought some hundreds of my men with him. What for ? I will tell you. Ah ! your heart tells you now : there is no need for me to speak."

"Then his designs are evil," said the King, with a slight shudder.

"King ! without that letter he was not to be trusted. After he received it he knew his fate," returned Pahar

Singh. "I have an evil reputation, they say : and he believed I would do anything for money. He sent an express messenger for me from Naldrug. I had come here with those letters, but my son went. Money was offered to him—rank—an estate—whatever he pleased. Why ? you already know. Yes—to kill you, O Adil Khan. My son pleaded fatigue and my absence—time also to collect the men. That is why Khan Muhammad did not arrive yesterday. That is why he is at Almella now. My son, Gopal Singh, is shrewd and wise. He secured all he could of the Wazir's money, and then rode on to meet me. He reached me last night, just as I had gained my hiding-place, of which he knew."

"And then ?" asked the King.

"My son had consented to do the work ; and that slave, the Wazir, believed him. The boy told me he pretended that there was a death feud between our house and yours, Adil Khan—was it not good ? O, he is a clever youth that. It was he who got those letters, too : and now he has received money from the slave. Enough ! Speak, O King. Is the slave to be delivered into your hand alive, or will you give him to me—to me, Pahar Singh ? Do you doubt me ? I ask no money—no reward from you. Your house—your very life—is in peril : Pahar Singh can save both, and ask nothing but to be held true to his master's salt."

"As you will, true servant," said the King, "for there is a stern and fearful necessity to be encountered. Whatever reward you may claim hereafter is freely bestowed upon you. All you have ever done against me or my people is forgiven. Take that slave for your own if you will, to deal with as it seems good to you."

"Remember," cried Pahar Singh, seizing the King's hand and holding it upon his head, "these words cannot be revoked. Whatever happens, I do but your bidding, O King. Now I go, whither you cannot trace me, but you will hear of me before the day is past."

"Go," replied the King. "I have no fear of you or of your acts. God direct and keep you, O true friend, whom He has sent me in my need. Go !"

"Only be careful," continued the man, withdrawing the King's hand from his head, kissing it reverently, and then releasing it—"only be careful! Stir not beyond the fort till the news comes to you. If there be any movement, send for Afzal Khan and his son Fazil; they are my bitter enemies, but they are true to you. Nay more, the Wazir's son is not with his father in this matter, and is true to you, O King, because of the young Fazil. And now I go. Send me beyond the gate, for I must not depart as I came."

"I am ready to go," said the Secretary. "They were marvelling at your sudden appearance. How was it?"

"I may tell you some time or other," returned Pahar Singh, smiling; "but come, it is almost day. Yet, before I depart, my lord, I would kiss your feet. The reverence I once paid your father, the noble Sultan Mahmud, I would pay to you." And so saying, he prostrated himself, embracing the King's feet, and kissing them respectfully.

Then he turned and passed rapidly through the curtain, followed by the Secretary.

After a short interval of silence, the Fakir's cry, "*If God give I will take!*" again arose more loudly, more confidently than before, and the King, stepping out on the terrace, listened, speculating how far the man might be gone on his deadly errand, and what would come of it.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE KING DECLARES WAR.

1. *The King's Darbar.*

Long before noon that day, the nobles of Bijapur, summoned by royal order to the Darbar, began to arrive at the great Hall of Audience, with their splendidly dressed bands of retainers. The King had early taken his seat upon the royal throne, which stood upon a low platform. On the right of the King sat Pir Khaderi Sahib, dressed all in white; and a little behind, Mirza Anwar Ali, the King's Secretary. Farther again behind, were men of the royal guard. The whole floor was covered with white cotton carpets, upon which the nobles, dressed all in white, were taking their seats. Their attendants, dressed in gorgeous colours and cloth-of-gold, stood near them against the walls.

The Secretary and the King's religious instructor noted carefully the names of the nobles as they were announced; and every now and then whispered to the King as those who were suspected of being disloyal passed. Though the hall was now nearly full, there was silence as though all were anxiously waiting, and when men spoke it was only in whispers.

The place of Afzal Khan, and that of the Wazir, were still empty, although the hour of noon was passed. It was true that the Wazir could not be expected to be punctual, as he had to come from Nal-drug; but his son might at least have been present.

"What hinders Afzal Khan?" whispered the Secretary to the Pir. "Is he going to fail us?"

"No," said the King in a low voice; "I know he is loyal. He saw me this morning and he told me much. I know where he has gone, and I expect him soon now."

"It is afternoon, my Prince," said the Mirza, "and we should not wait longer. Shall I order silence?"

"Yes. I am ready," the King replied.

"*Khámosh!* Silence!" cried the attendants stationed about the hall, and in the corridors outside.

The silence that ensued was almost oppressive. In the hall itself, after the men had once more settled themselves in their seats, there was not a sound or murmur. The noise without ceased, and even the troops were still, save where a neigh, or the rattle of harness, as horses tossed their heads or champed their bits, broke the stillness; or an elephant, clashing his bells, lifted his trunk, and gave a short scream.

It was the Secretary's office to open the business of the day.

"O nobles and well-wishers of the State!" he cried in a strong, manly voice, "it is not mere ceremony for which you have been summoned this day. The King has called you together because of those grievous rumours of treachery which prevail: and because of intrigues which have sown distrust between man and man in this city. Of these, two have been revealed to him by means little short of a miracle, and yet so true, that a child may understand them. Hear, then, what my lord the King will say to you,—listen!"

The King spoke from his throne, and though his voice was of a gentler character than his Secretary's, its silvery ringing tones were even more distinctly heard.

"O friends and subjects!" he said, "O noble Dekhanies, there is enmity and treachery among you. Listen!"

The King paused, and drew some papers from under his cushions, and held them up for all to see. "A man," he continued, "whom I venerated as a father, has been false. False to me, his King; false to the kingdom and to you; false to his oath to God. Here is his writing, here are his seals—look at them. These are letters from the Wazir, Khan Muhammad, to the Pádsháh Alamgir; in them he offers to give away our kingdom to the enemy in return for titles, wealth and power."

"Justice, justice!" cried a thousand voices: "stamp out the treason!" while many rose excitedly to their feet and were pulled down again by their neighbours.

"Wait," continued the King. "Let him be heard in his own behalf when he arrives; do not prejudge him. If these are untrue, there is no honour we possess or can confer, that shall not be his. If true, let the just God judge him before you all."

"*Amin, amin!*" cried the Pir devoutly. "*Amin, amin!*" was echoed by the assembly, in a hoarse roar, which filled the hall. Again there was silence.

"The next is a more simple matter," continued the King, with increased confidence. "You know of Sivaji Bhónslé; how often his father rebelled, and was punished, and again forgiven by our father; how often the son had been guilty of crimes. All these would have been forgiven. But treachery cannot be forgiven. Look, friends, here, in the same packet, are these letters from Sivaji to the Pádshah. We who have fed this wolf are his enemies; those who have hunted him are his friends. Here are lists of forts which will be taken and held for the Moghuls, of districts to pay for armies, of men who will join with their local levies. Between them they will share the Dekhan, and Sivaji will be the imperial Vice-regent!"

"Did you hear, friends?" he continued, after a pause. "Do you desire to serve under the infidel? I am young. I have no experience. But I am the son of one who led you to victory! I am one who has been nursed in war, and will lead you again! Choose, then, between them and the King of your ancient dynasty."

In an instant a shout of "*Din! Din!* For the faith! For the faith! We will die for you!"—rang through the building, as men, no longer able to control their emotions, started to their feet and shouted the war-cry of Islam. Those who were without had noticed the emotion in the hall, but had not been aware of its cause. Now, however, the familiar battle-shout fell on willing ears, and was returned from the thousands gathered there, with an enthusiasm which knew no bounds. "*Din! Din!*"

2. *The end of a Traitor.*

Just then a strong body of horse, known to all as belonging to Afzal Khan, swept round the corner of the building with its standard unfurled, and its kettle-drums beating loudly, the brave old Khan himself and his son riding in front. Many within the hall looked around anxiously as Afzal Khan and Fazil Khan, with several officers, dismounted at the entrance. The King turned to those behind him.

"Ah," he cried, triumphantly, "God has heard our prayers, and here are our noble friends."

Afzal Khan was well known, and a hearty shout had greeted him as he dismounted, looked proudly about him, and returned the salutations of his friends and the soldiers. But men marked that his face was unusually stern as, after saying something to the officer of the guard, he and his son walked up the hall towards the royal throne. Just as he and Fazil were about to present their sword-hilts as "nasrs" to the King, the officer of the guard stepped hastily behind the dais and whispered hurriedly in the King's ear.

"My lord, my Prince, be careful of yourself. There will be a disturbance; we will close round you; come away. The Wazir is dead—killed, they say, at the outer gate as he entered. Withdraw with us—quick! The news is spreading fast!"

"What is this?" cried the King, starting to his feet. "The Wazir is dead, they say, Afzal Khan. Is this true?"

"It is true, O King: that traitor, Khan Muhammad is dead. Who dare harm you? Ho!" he shouted, turning round to face the assembly, "all true men present, rally round your King!"

Except a few, whose faces were dark and anxious, those in the hall sprang to their feet shouting the Khan's battle cry, "Fateh-i-Nabi!" (Victory to the prophet). When the excitement had died down a little, the King turned again to Afzal Khan.

"Tell us," he said, "how it happened."

"Our services were not needed after all," said the

Khan; and the King nodded, as though he understood. "His own followers killed him. But this man will tell you what he saw."

An officer stepped forward and prostrated himself before the King. "My lord," he said, "they murdered him at the gate. Those who did it went off across the plain, but they were the men who had ridden with him. I was upon the bastion above the gate, and saw them coming rapidly along the road from Allapur. I knew my lord's piebald horse, and his elephant following at a little distance. My lord Afzal Khan and his men were waiting inside the gate, and outside there was sitting a Fakir who was crying, "If God gives, I take!" to the passers-by. As they drew near the gate, I saw several of the men behind drag the Wazir from his horse, and others on foot, who had been running with them, killed him with a hundred wounds before he could cry out. Then the whole party wheeled round and rapidly dispersed. It all happened so suddenly that we could do nothing."

"And what became of the Fakir?" asked the King, looking towards the Secretary.

"My prince, he stayed with the body, and shut the eyes," replied the man. "Then, as the Wazir's elephant arrived, he told the driver to take up the dead, and we saw him go towards the mosque, crying as before, 'If God give, I will take!' Hark!" he continued, "there he is."

"*If God give, I will take!*" The cry came nearer and nearer, never changing or faltering—heard above all other noises and confusion within and without—up the steps, along the great corridor, into the hall, where every one made way before the brawny form and excited looks of the crier—who paused not, nor yet looked right or left, till he reached the dais. Afzal Khan and Fazil would have stopped him, but he strode on.

"*If God give, I will take!*" he cried, looking at the King without saluting him. "Khan Muhammad is dead from a hundred wounds. As I closed his eyes I saw this on the ground; it had fallen from him, so I

have brought it"; and flinging a case containing papers to the King, he turned away without salutation. Shouting the old cry with his right arm bare and stretched high above his head, he strode out of the hall, continuing it as he passed out of the building through the attendants and troops, and so away.

"Among these papers," said the Secretary, whispering to the King, "are many which, if now disclosed, might make men desperate; they are better kept secret."

"I am weary of them all," cried the King impatiently: "look at the judgment of God; we should own it reverently."

"Injustice!" cried a knot of men who had collected at one side of the hall, and had risen from their seats. "Is murder to be done, and pass unchallenged?" Their tone was fierce and defiant, and boded no good.

"Peace, O friends!" cried Afzal Khan, stretching out his hands to them. "Is this a time for strife? who can say by whose hands he died? Yet better dead, than for this guilt to be proved before all, by these witnesses—his own hand and seals. O friends, brothers in the faith! there is the throne we have to defend, and we should count it holy martyrdom to die before it. We are ready; will you be tardy?"

"*Din, Din!* listen to Afzal Khan! *Fatch-i-Nabi!*" was shouted with deafening clamour.

"Silence, friends!" cried the Pir, as there was a short cessation of the shouting; "listen to me. One traitor is dead, but are we less than men that we permit Sivaji Bhónslé, his accomplice, to defile our beards? *Din, Din!* cry to God for victory. *Din, Din!*"

Again, again his cry was raised, and grave men hitherto unmoved, roused with the rest to frantic enthusiasm by the holy man's words, threw themselves on each other's necks and wept aloud.

"And now, friends," continued the King, when he could be heard, "let him who would punish Sivaji Bhónslé for a thousand crimes and treacheries, take up

the gage I place here. In the name of God and the Prophet, let who will take it, I accept him ;” and so saying he motioned to an attendant, who, bringing forward a plate covered with a brocaded cloth, set it down on the edge of the dais before the King, and uncovered it.

On the plate lay a single *birra* of Pân, covered with gold leaf, one of those which, at the conclusion of the ceremony, would be distributed by thousands. Who would take it up ?

“Are you laggards, my friends, in pursuit of honour ? I thought yonder gage would be a mark for men to strive for ; are you laggards, O faithful ?” cried the Pir.

The mass—for every one had risen to his feet—swayed to and fro with emotion, but no one advanced ; and out of it issued the hoarse ominous murmur that had several times arisen.

At this moment Afzal Khan stepped boldly forward, and taking up the gage, pressed it to his forehead, eyes, and lips ; then, saluting the King, held it high above his head for all to see.

“My prince, it is mine,” he said, “I will bring the ‘Mountain Rat’ in chains to your feet.”

“You have heard,” said the King, turning to the assembly, “I accept him.”

It was the crowning point of the ceremony, and the people, no longer withheld by court etiquette, swayed forward to the foot of the dais with tumultuous shouts of joy. Those without only knew that war had been proclaimed, and their cries mingled hoarsely with the rest.

“It is well this should cease, my lord,” said the Secretary. “Men’s hearts are hot, and enough has been done to-day.”

“Good,” replied the King, “let the criers dismiss the assembly ; and proclaim that there will be preaching in the Jumma Mosque daily, at noon, till the army advances.”

It was done. Attendants went round with trays of Pân, reserving Utr and other sweet essences for those

privileged to receive them. The King sat to the last, and the great hall was gradually emptied, save of the royal guards, Afzal Khan and his son, and other nobles, who had been desired to remain.

3. *Pahar Singh again.*

"We may now separate," said the King. "O noble Khan, what can I say for this service you have done? This sword is known to you; wear it for the sake of Adil Khan. And do you, Fazil Khan, take these, the first marks of honour you have won—but not the last;" and removing the costly jewel from his turban, and a heavy necklace of pearls from his neck, he invested the young man with them with his own hands.

"I have but one boon to ask, my prince," said Fazil; "it is for my friend, the Wazir's son. I will answer for him with my life, that he was as true as I am. May I console him?"

"Take this to him," said the King, removing a gold ring from his wrist; "tell him that from Adil Shah he need fear nothing."

"Congratulations, Khan Sahib," a man cried, heartily yet respectfully, to Afzal Khan and Fazil, as they were passing out and receiving the warm greetings of their friends, "let your poor servant be honoured by his congratulations being accepted."

"Ah, friend, are you there?" replied the Khan, recognizing our friend, Lala Tulsi Das, "well you must be seen to; come to my house and we will arrange something for you."

"I am my lord's slave to death. I am but a poor Khayet, but I can be of use to a discerning patron," returned the Lala.

"Come, son," said the Khan, "let us see whether Khowas Khan has returned. The King's message should be delivered before we proceed home. I think he and all his people would be safer with us for a few days, until men's minds are calmer."

* * * *

"A Fakir says he must see you, my lord," said

Gulab to Afzal Khan, as he sat quietly in his accustomed seat after the evening prayer. "He will not go away, but cursed frightfully when we said you were tired, and were resting in private."

"A Fakir, Gulab! Do you know him?"

"All he says, master, is 'If God give, I will take!'" replied the woman, "and he declared he would cut himself with a knife and throw his blood upon us if we did not tell you. Hark! there is a shout."

The Khan did not delay. "I know him, Gulab," he said. "Go and say I come."

"Bid every one depart," said the man as Afzal Khan approached him, attended by several servants. "What I have to say to you brooks no listeners. There," he continued, when all had gone; and flinging down a bloody scarf at the Khan's feet, "look, it is his blood. Take these things that I found on him."

"His seal and these papers, Syn. More treason, perhaps. And you have buried him? Else——"

"I have cared for that; it does not concern you, Khan."

"And who are you, Syn? We have met before to-day."

"Ay, Khan, and before that often. Am I safe with you? Put your hand on my head—nay, fear not a poor servant of God—and I will tell you who I am."

"Surely, friend," replied Afzal Khan, putting out his hand upon the high felt cap, "fear not."

"Not there, not there; on my head," cried the man, grasping the Khan's hand, and kissing it while he removed the cap; "on my head, on my head. Ask Ali Adil Shah of me, and remember—Pahar Singh."

"Pahar Singh!" exclaimed the Khan starting back.

"Hush, fear not; I have been pardoned, and the Shah's hand has been before yours on my head; fear not, I will be true to you, for you are faithful to him. Your hand once more, Khan, freely and truly upon my head."

"Go, friend," said Afzal Khan, placing it as he desired. "Go, I doubt you not, for I have heard

what happened last night ; go in peace. Whatever you can do for the Shah will not be forgotten."

As he departed, the men on guard would have stopped him ; but again the old cry arose, and in his assumed character no one molested him, as the shout, rising and falling on the air, died away in the far distance.

Afzal Khan took up the bloody scarf and gave it to an attendant. "Let it be washed and kept till I ask for it," he said.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PLOTTERS OF TULJAPUR.

I. *A Plot against a Girl.*

Tannaji Malúsré had remained in hiding at an old deserted temple near Allapur, until his scouts had brought him the news of Balwant Rao's having survived his wound and of the occurrences in the Durbar of the King. Watching from the terrace of the temple, he had seen the Wazir's arrival at Allapur; followed his course across the plain; and guessed, by the confusion and shots at the gate, and the dispersion of the horsemen with him, that something extraordinary had taken place, the particulars of which were related by his scouts. Under the presence of Pahar Singh, therefore, Bijapur was no longer safe; and as night closed, the whole party, unobserved, left their hiding-place to its usual tenants, the jackals and hyenas of the plain.

Malúsré had determined to visit Tuljapur before he returned to his master. In his last letter to Bijapur, Moro Trimmul had directed his agent there to inform Malúsré that there would be recitations in the temple, and that, under cloak of this, most of the heads of the Mahratta families were to assemble; it would therefore be well for him to meet them there. Moreover, it was necessary that Moro Trimmul should have the first news of the Wazir's death. It was a long ride certainly; but it was possible to reach Tuljapur and to secure Moro Trimmul's safety, in case it should be threatened.

Malúsré and his party travelled all that night and the next day, and reached Tuljapur as the evening fell. They went straight to the house of one of the faithful supporters of Sivaji, who was well known to Malúsré and who welcomed them warmly. After a meal and a short rest, Malúsré was taken by his host through the town to the temple.

It was no easy matter, however, to get there, for the crowds were almost impassable ; but good-humour prevailed, and, after some struggles, the lower court and the great assembly were safely reached.

It was a remarkable sight. The court itself, lit up by many torches, was crowded with spectators so closely packed that to move was impossible. They were sitting upon the paved floor in rows facing the centre, where an open space had been provided for the priests, and an avenue left for their communication with the shrine. Around this the most distinguished of the guests had been placed ; and Malúsré observed with satisfaction that many influential persons whom he desired to see were present. So far, his visit could not have been better timed.

As the party advanced, Moro Trimmul, who was among the Brahman reciters, saw the tall figure of Malúsré in the crowd, and advanced hastily to greet him.

A few whispered words sufficed to explain the situation of affairs at Bijapur, and the necessity for immediate action.

"We must dismiss the assembly earlier than usual," Moro said, in reply to Malúsré's anxious question as to how long the ceremonies would be continued, "and I will hasten what remains. Do not heed me ; I have to take my part now, and as the assembly rises I will rejoin you."

So saying, Moro Trimmul passed into the dark vestibule of the temple, and was divesting himself of his upper garments and turban, when, from a pillar behind, the girl Gunga came towards him.

"I have been searching for you," she said : "where have you been so long ?"

"No matter where," he said gloomily. "What have you done ?"

"Nothing," she replied. "I can do nothing with words, for she despises me and will not speak to me. But I have a plan."

"A plan ? What is it ?"

"Something you must do yourself, though I can arrange for it. You must carry her off."

"That is what I had determined on myself. But when, and how, can it be done?"

"On the last night of the ceremonies," said Gunga. "I can get the key of the gate behind the temple, and keep it open unobserved. I have friends among the Ramosis, who will help us. I am their priestess and they dare not refuse."

"Good!" said Moro. "We will talk this over. Now I must go; they are calling for me."

2. *A Plot against a King.*

Never before had Moro Trimmul recited so well. At every interval the applause of the whole assembly arose in hoarse murmurs and loud clapping of hands, while many wept. But at last it was over for the night, and the crowd left the temple. But many who had been secretly asked to stay behind, collected in the vestibule of the shrine to meet Tannaji Malúsré and hear what he had to say to them.

A solitary lamp flickered on the altar where the image still rested, and cast a feeble and uncertain light into that portion of the vestibule which was immediately before it, and where Malúsré, Moro Trimmul, and the rest now seated themselves. Otherwise the spacious area was altogether in deep gloom.

Malúsré's narrative was listened to with breathless interest by his hearers. He had never as yet come among them, but his name and feats were well known through many a rough ballad both of love and war. There he sat, face to face with them; his large soft eyes flashing with excitement, and adding force to the few but burning words he spoke. Tannaji was no novice in the art of reading men's hearts; and among the mountains and valleys where he lived, there were already thousands of the best youth of the country at his command.

"Now," he said finally, "you have heard all. We are before the Holy Mother, who comes to our Prince in his dreams, and tells him what to do. O Holy

Mother!" he continued, rising and bowing with joined hands in adoration to the image, "here are thy children; bless them, make them bold and true; they will swear not to hang back when 'the fire is on the hills,' and when they can strike for thy honour. Hear thou the oath, and accept it."

As he paused and looked round there was at first a low murmur of acquiescence. Then those who had been sitting started to their feet, and as many as could reach it rushed to the threshold of the shrine and touched it reverently, those who could not, stretched out their arms towards it over each other's heads, while wild cries of "*Jai Kali!*" "*Jai Tulja Mata!*" "*Bóm Bóm!*" (We swear, we swear!) rang through the vestibule, and were taken up by those without.

"Now, let us write the names," cried Malúsré, when the excitement had in some degree subsided; "sit down again, friends, and if there be a scribe among you let him come forward."

The Patwari, or hereditary clerk of the temple, was there, with his writing materials tied up in a bundle, and he sat down and took them out.

It was, indeed, a strange and impressive scene. In the midst sat Malúsré and Moro Trimmul, with the scribe; around the heads of local families, Nimbalkurs, Bhónslés, Sindias, Ghoreparés, and a host of others, each anxious to be named in the record, and leaning forward to catch the eye of the scribe.

One by one—chiefs, gentry, yeomen—gave in their names and the number of men they could bring, and page after page was filled by the record till no more remained.

"It is done, friends," said Malúsré, rising, "there are more than fifteen thousand men recorded. Enough for the time, and more hereafter. By-and-by, when 'the fire is on the hills,' you will be welcome; till then, separate and be quiet, else Afzal Khan will come upon you."

As he spoke those who had been sitting rose, and all in turn saluting Malúsré, the meeting broke up.

"I shall depart before daylight, Moro Trimmul," said

Malúsré, as they proceeded to the back of the temple, where their ponies and attendants awaited their coming ; " will you follow ? "

" I have more to do here, Tannaji," he replied ; " but after the *Naw Ratri* I will come. I must watch Afzal Khan and Pahar Singh."

" Take care they do not watch you," returned Malúsré as he rode away.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CAPTURE OF TARA.

1. *Pahar Singh's proposal.*

Afzal Khan lost no time in making his preparations for the campaign against Sivaji. Having, when a younger man, governed the provinces where Sivaji was now such a power, he knew what a difficult country he had to invade—how high and steep its mountains and how thick its jungles and forests. It was no country for cavalry; and so the army he organised consisted mainly of infantry and artillery.

While the Khan and his son were busy in the field, Lurli, his second wife, and Zaina were no less busy in the house; for, to Zaina's delight, the Khan had decided to take the family with him. Khawas Khan, also, was to accompany the expedition in command of a body of troops. He had not suffered by his father's treachery, for the King was satisfied that he had known nothing of it. Of the King's knowledge of the secret of the late Wazir's murder, Khawas Khan knew nothing. He believed that his father had been killed by some discharged soldiers out of revenge.

Before the family left Bijapur, the long talked of betrothal between Khawas Khan and Zaina was celebrated.

At length all was ready, and the main part of the army marched off to Shulapur, Lurli and Zaina under the escort of Balwant Rao, who had sufficiently recovered from his wound to take part in the campaign.

Afzal Khan, with his son Fazil and Khawas Khan and a company of light horse had, in the meantime, ridden to Naldrúg, where he spent several days in selecting and equipping the troops that were to accompany him. During his brief stay the chief officers of the country rode in to pay their respects; and among

others, Pahar Singh, no longer disguised, but in his proper character as one of the wardens of the frontier marches, attended and did service with a body of picked men which rivalled of the royal troops in splendour of appearance.

Very different were the chief and his nephew now, in comparison with the time when we last saw them; and in the noble figure, dressed in light chain armour and cloth-of-gold, riding a superb grey horse, and giving commands to his men, no one could have recognized the old ragged Fakir.

On the fourth evening after his arrival, the Khan was busy in his apartment in the fort over despatches and other papers, when Pahar Singh came to see him. He was muffled closely in a sheet, as he did not wish his visit to be known.

"Ha, Pahar Singh!" said the Khan, "what brings you here so late at night?"

"When I left you, Khan Sahib, the night after the Durbar," replied the chief, "I had knowledge that Tannaji Malúsré was in the city, and I knew where he was. My people watched every bazaar and street during the day, but he kept close, like a bear in his den, till night, and then stole away. My boy and some of my people wanted to catch him in his den; but I knew Tannaji could not be taken alive by mortal, and I wanted to see him hanged; so I took a body of my horse and rode after him. But he escaped us, Khan. He went on to Tuljapur; how, I know not. He was seen there in the temple, and he left again no one knows whither."

"He was—he is—the very bone and sinew of this rebellion," said the Khan.

"True, as Sivaji Rajah is the spirit; but he left some of the bones behind him at Tuljapur," returned the chief, with a grim smile; "and I can pick them up for you, my lord, if you will either help me or let me do it alone as best I can."

"Who are these 'bones,' friend? Who, or what are they?"

"Well, there is Moro Trimmul, Malúsré's agent and shadow; as wily, and more mischievous. He is still

at Tuljapur, pretending to give recitations,—and they are very good, my lord, in their way,—and to serve at the temple. Then there are all those who will assemble there. Have you remarked, my lord, that hardly any of the heads of the old Mahratta families have come to present their *Nazrs* to you ? ”

“ I have remarked it,” returned the Khan, “ but supposed they were afraid of some demand for forage, or horses, or money, and therefore kept clear of me.”

“ Not at all,” returned the chief, “ they have all sworn to aid Sivaji, and Malúsré took an account of their quotas of horse and foot with him to the Rajah.”

“ Then they met Malúsré ? ”

“ They did, my lord, the night he came to the temple, and here are their names. And now, do you wish to seize this gang of rebels or not ? I advise you to do so, because they are strong, and, should there be any difficulties in the West, are capable of making a serious diversion, especially if Malúsré or this Brahman gets among them.”

“ Good ! ” said the Khan ; “ it is well said, and I believe you. But are they still there ? and how many may there be of them ? ”

“ Five hundred perhaps, including followers ; and they are still there.”

“ And is this temple a strong place ? Do we require guns ? ”

“ Strong enough to defend if they knew you were coming,” returned Pahar Singh, “ but for the most part they will be unarmed, and looking at the show. We need only cavalry to surround the town, and no one can escape us. No guns, my lord ; they could not be taken up the mountain at night, and ours must be a surprise, else the temple will be dark as midnight.”

“ Good,” said the Khan ; “ It shall be done ; but when ? I should march to-morrow for Sholapur.”

“ Do so, my lord, and halt at Tandulwari ; ’tis half way. I will join you there with some of my people the day after to-morrow, and lead you at night by a pass in the hills which I know of, so that we can surround the place unobserved.”

2. *Moro's Preparations.*

The temple at Tuljapur was crowded. It was the night of the *Amáwas*, or that which immediately precedes the new moon, and the ceremonies in the temple would be kept up until the new moon appeared. People had come in from all the country round and had been crowding into the temple since the afternoon.

Among this crowd had come Vyas Shastri, with Ananda, Radha and Tara, accompanied by Moro Trimmul, who had dined at the Shastri's house. Moro had so well acted his part that none of the family suspected the wicked plot he had laid against Tara. They descended the steps into the lower court of the temple together; and while Tara, her mother, and the Shastri entered the vestibule to make their salutation to the goddess, Moro Trimmul excused himself on the pretence of bringing his books, and went round to the back of the shrine, where he found Gunga in her rich dress and heavy gold and silver ornaments as a priestess of the temple.

"Is everything ready?" said the girl, looking up, as Moro approached her.

"Yes; I have prepared everything," he replied. "My servant will bring the horses and the litter into the ravine below the temple, and wait near the steps there. Have you got the key?"

"Look," she cried, crossing to the door, and partly opening it, "it is already open, and the key is here hidden in my dress. We can lock it outside, and throw the key into the bushes. When I beckon to you, come, for I will entice her here. But what if we are pursued?"

"There is no danger of that," said Moro with a low laugh. "The Shastri does not keep a horse, and he could not get the services of any horsemen from the authorities at night. Who would care for the ravings of a Brahman, whose daughter, a priestess of the temple, had run away, as people would say, with her lover?"

"And you will really do it, and not draw back?"

"Enough," he said, "we must not be seen together here. I will not fail you." The two conspirators

separated and went into the temple court to take part in the ceremonies.

3. *Tara's capture.*

It was a rare night of enjoyment to the crowds assembled in the temple, and attracted by the unusual amount of entertainment the town itself was nearly deserted by its Hindu inhabitants, who had betaken themselves to the lower court, which was as full as it could well be packed : the people sitting in rows on the ground, or perched upon terraces, the roofs of houses, and upon that of the vestibule.

As the night wore on, and the assembly seemed in no humour to separate, Ananda had proposed to Tara to retire before the crush began. But Tara herself was in the highest spirits.

"Do you and Radha go," she said ; "it will be well. I cannot leave anything unfinished, else the Mother will be angry, and I shall regret it. I shall stay near the shrine, and return with my father."

Ananda did not object, and she and Radha made their way home through the deserted streets without interruption.

Meanwhile the rites proceeded, and the recitations. Moro Trimmul was declaiming, with unusually excited gestures and eloquence, the impassioned passages which had been assigned to him, often interrupted by the cries of "*Jai Kali ! Jai Tulja !*" and the clapping of hands which proceeded from the people whenever a favourite sentiment or allusion to the glorious days of Hindu power occurred in the text. Before concluding his part he had withdrawn to the back of the temple and beckoned to Gunga.

"See," she said, as she came to him, "all is ready. There is no one by the door inside ; but try it, and ascertain who are outside. Be ready only, and trust to me for the rest. Nay, I will come with you—look !"

The place was dark, for there was no illumination behind the temple, and by its mass a broad shadow was thrown on the recess in which the door was

situated. The girl stepped into it, followed by the Brahman, and opened the door slightly. A number of dark forms were sitting without on a small terrace, from which descended a flight of steps into the ravine. One rose. "Wagya!" she said in a low voice.

"I am here, lady," he replied; "is it time?"

"Not yet. When the next procession passes round the corner yonder, come out to look at it; you will not be noticed. Have you the blanket?"

"It is here," he said, holding one up; "and they are all ready yonder," and he pointed to the trees, where there was a dull glow as of the embers of a small fire—"palankin, horses and all."

"Good," she replied; "now be careful, and watch."

"Are you satisfied?" she continued to Moro Trimul, who had remained behind the door.

"Yes; you are true, Gunga. I am true also, and here is the belt; put it on, and let it shame hers," he replied, taking the ornament from underneath his waist-cloth where he had concealed it.

"Ah!" she cried, taking it and clasping it round her waist, "you are——"

"What is that?" he cried, interrupting her and catching her arm; "there is some disturbance without. What can it be? Listen!"

"I will look," she said; "stay here."

She turned the corner of the temple, but could proceed no farther. Every one had risen: and there was a wild, struggling, heaving mass of people before her, from among which piercing shrieks of women and children, mingled with hoarse cries of men, were rising fast in a dreadful clamour; while several shots, discharged in quick succession at the gate above; seemed to add to the general terror and confusion.

"They are fighting at the gate!" cried a man near her; and a cry of "the Turks, the Turks!" followed in agonizing tones from the women.

Gunga did not hesitate. She, perhaps, of all that crowd, was the most collected. Darting to Moro Trimul she said hastily, "Do not move—I will bring her;" and so passed round to the back of the temple. As she

did so, she met Tara and several other girls, some screaming, others silent from terror.

"My father! O Gunga, my father!" cried Tara piteously, "come with me, we will find him. Come; I have none but you, Gunga, who dare seek him; come with me!"

"Yes," she said, "round this way; I saw him a moment ago. Come, we will get down the steps; I know the way up the mountain from below. Come!" cried Gunga with a shriek; and seeing that Tara hesitated, and that people were crowding through the vestibule in the dark portion of the court, and hiding themselves among the cloisters,—she caught her arm and dragged her forward.

Moro Trimmul saw the action, and, unnoticed in the confusion, seized Tara from behind. The girl's shrieks seemed to ring high above all others in that horrible tumult, but they were quickly stifled in the blanket thrown over her, while she was borne rapidly down the steps.

"You cannot return, Moro," said Gunga, who had locked the door and flung away the key, "let us flee for our lives. Hark! they are fighting within, and may follow us."

"O for my sword to strike in once for those poor friends!" cried Moro Trimmul with a groan. "They have been seeking me, and the rest will suffer."

"Hush, and come fast," cried Gunga, dragging him down the steps. "Fool, will you die with the rest? Away! mount and ride for your life; I will bring her after you."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RESCUE OF TARA.

I. *The Biter Bit.*

As has been explained before, the temple of Tuljapur stands at the bottom of a deep ravine. Pahar Singh had caught the Mahratta rebels in a trap by surrounding the temple. He had sent his nephew Gopal and Fazil Khan round to hold the end of the ravine below the temple; while he and Afzal Khan with the main body occupied the town. The town was taken completely by surprise and offered no resistance; but when the great temple gate was reached, the alarm had been given and they found the gates shut and defended. Here a struggle took place. At last the gate was forced, and Pahar Singh and his men rode into the temple enclosure. His and the Khan's intention had been to arrest the men they wanted quietly; but the determined resistance of the Mahratta leaders and their men led to a fight in which innocent people were killed. Vyas Shastri, remembering his old skill in weapons, had seized a sword as Pahar Singh's men swept through the gate, but he was immediately struck down, and those who entered the temple trampled over him as one of the slain.

Ananda and Radhā were safe at home. Hearing the shots and the noise of the terrified crowd, they sat cowering in their chamber, shivering at every sound, and, having extinguished the light, remained in utter darkness.

"Lady, lady!" cried a man's voice in the outer verandah; "where are you?"

"It is Jānū Nāik, the Ramosi," said Ananda in a whisper. "God reward him for coming; he is true; Radhā, let us go with him."

"Lady, lady! the house is not safe! come," con-

tinued the man earnestly; "leave all—my people will guard it—only come."

The terror of violence brought them forth. "Follow me," he said; "here are twenty men to guard the house—no one will molest them."

The women followed silently, sobbing as they went. The Ramosi led them northwards out of the town to the edge of the ravine, and descended a steep path, which they knew led to a spring in one of the broad steps or ledges of the mountain, near which was a recess in the rock familiar to both. "Stay here," he said; "no one can see you. I must return: here, I should only betray you."

So saying he left them.

On the other side, in the lower ravine, the progress of the band which carried off Tara was but a short one. Fazil Khan and Gopal Singh and their men had been waiting for some time. Soon after they had heard the first shots fired at the temple gate, they saw a light coming towards them down the ravine.

"Not a word from any one," whispered Gopal Singh to his men; "some one is escaping. They cannot get away from us."

The gloom of night and some bushes concealed them, and the advancing party saw and suspected nothing. Moro Trimmul was riding in front, Gunga following him. The palankin was behind with the Ramosis and servants around it on all sides.

"Stop!" cried Fazil, as he laid hold of the Brahman and held his naked sword over him. "Who are you?—nay, struggle or attempt to escape, and I will kill you.—A Brahman? Who are you?"

"Moro Trimmul, by the gods!" exclaimed Gopal Singh, who recognized him as the light from the torch fell upon him. "Ah, Maharaj!" he added, "you don't know me, but I have seen you before."

"Then we are indeed fortunate, friends," said Fazil joyfully; "and who is in the litter?"

"My wife," said the Brahman sullenly; "do as you will with me, but let her and the servants go on."

"Then you have married only lately, Pundit?" said

Gopal Singh drily; "you had no wife three days ago."

"Open the door! release me! release me!" cried Tara from within in piteous accents. "Let me go! let me go! Ah, sirs, release me!"

"Are you his wife?" asked Fazil, dismounting and opening the door of the palankin; "if so, fear not, we have no war with women."

"Not so: I am not his wife," cried Tara hastily, throwing herself at Fazil's feet. "O sir, save me! Noble sir, save me from him; he would have carried me away. Nay, I shall not rise till you tell me you will take me to my father. O return with me and rescue him or he will be slain! Come, I shall lead you back; he is a priest of the temple!"

"It cannot be, girl," said Fazil. "It cannot be till daylight, and no one will touch your father if he be a Brahman; so sit in the litter and fear not. And you are not his wife?" and he pointed to Moro Trimmul.

"O no, my lord," said the girl trembling; "he would have carried me away by force. Do not give me to him, I beseech you."

"Fear not," said Fazil; "no harm shall come to you here. There is more in this matter than we can now find out, friends," he continued to those about him; "but bind that Brahman on his horse, and tie it to one of your own."

"Ah, sir, I will do that beautifully," cried Lakhshman, "and with his own waistcloth too."

"My lord," said Gopal Singh, "the disturbance above grows worse—had we not better send the women and others to the rear? If there is any rush this way, they may come to harm."

"A good thought, friend," replied Fazil.

"It is no use," cried the terrified Gunga, "the door is locked, and the key was thrown away: no one can escape from there by this road."

So they remained, while the tumult increased to a roar which filled the glen, above which shots were now and then heard; then fell to a dull murmur, and finally seemed to die away in the distant town. The temple

lights became dim, and went out one by one, and the ravine grew dark. Then the stars shone out, and after a while dawn broke, and the mountain, and the rugged precipices of the glen and town above, were gradually revealed in the grey light.

2. *Moro Trimmul a Prisoner.*

Tara had remained in the palankin, listening to the fearful din, and shuddering as she listened. When all was silent at last, her mind was still in a tumult. While she was filled with heartfelt gratitude for her wonderful deliverance, she was miserable with anxiety about the fate of her father, her mother and Radha. What had happened? What did it all mean? Who was this young Mussulman nobleman, who spoke to her so courteously in her own Mahratta language? He had looked so grand as the torchlight flashed upon his steel helmet and silvery coat of mail. Her mind was all in confusion; yet one thing was clear—this noble youth had saved her from the evil designs of Moro Trimmul and Gunga.

It was now light enough to move, and the young Khan, calling to the bearers, ordered them to take up the litter. They were about to do so when Tara cried out,

“O do not take me away! Let me go! I can find my way. My father is Vyas Shastri, the chief priest of the temple. Take me to him, and he and my mother will bless you!”

“Vyas Shastri!” cried Gopal Singh. “Then this, Meah Sahib, is his daughter Tara, the strange new Murli. Are you not Tara, girl? Speak truly.”

“I am Tara,” she replied, “but no Murli: I serve only in the temple.”

“Who is this girl?” said Fazil sternly to Moro Trimmul. “What are you doing with her? Is she Vyas Shastri’s daughter?”

“I give no answer; find out for yourself,” replied Moro Trimmul, sullenly.

“It is no use asking him, Meah,” said Gopal Singh;

"let us take her up to the town and see after her people."

"Not yet," replied Fazil. "Let these persons remain here, while we go first and see what has happened in the town. Stay here, Sher Khan, with the men. See that no one disturbs the girl, and keep the others apart. Fear not," he continued to Tara; "keep close within the palankin and no one can harm you; I will bring you news of your people."

"Fear not, lady," said Sher Khan, a fine old soldier, as Fazil and Gopal rode away; "he will be as good as his word."

When Fazil Khan and Gopal Singh reached the summit of the pass, they found the horsemen assembling between the town and the mountain, and soon after Fazil met a troop of men of his own *Pāēgah*, in the midst of which rode his father and Pahar Singh.

A hearty greeting followed, and Fazil saw that his father's face was flushed with excitement, while Pahar Singh looked stern and even sad.

"Come on, my son," cried the Khan, heartily: "we have caught the rebels, and Tuljapur will long remember firing upon Afzal Khan's men. But we did not get that Brahman of Sivaji's—what was his name, Pahar Singh?"

"Moro Trimmul," said the chief.

"I have taken him," said Fazil, "with two women and their servants."

"Now God be praised!" cried the Khan; "that crowns our work. We will have him up and examine him. Who are these women who were with him?"

Fazil told all he knew. "She is the daughter of the chief priest of the temple, and this Moro Trimmul seems to have intended some wrong against her. She is distracted with grief as to the fate of her father, who was in the temple. But he must be safe. Surely the priests were not injured, father?"

"Well," said Afzal Khan, rather apologetically, "it was not our fault. We told them plainly we came peaceably. But those Mahratta rebels resisted, and fired on us; and when one of Pahar Singh's favourite followers

was shot, his men were savage, and ours also got a bit out of hand. But it cannot be helped now; it was destiny."

Fazil Khan was sick at heart at the news, for he knew what trouble might come of it; but it was no use protesting when it was all over.

"I am sorry it has happened so," he said. "But while you rest here, father, I will go and try to find the girl's father, Vyas Shastri."

The result of the inquiries was only to confirm Fazil's worst fears. Some priests in the temple assured him with tears that they had seen Vyas Shastri struck down and that his body had already been carried away for burning. Janú Naik was found, but he had no idea of telling a young Muslim nobleman that Ananda Bai and Radha had been guided by his son early in the morning to the village of Afzinga, where they were in safety; but he swore that their house had been attacked and they were both dead.

When Fazil Khan returned he found Moro Trimmul, still bound, waiting outside the house, along with Gunga, also bound. He was immediately called in and brought before Afzal Khan. Lakhshman attended the prisoner with his sword drawn.

Moro Trimmul stood before his judges, erect and haughty. His tightly clenched hands were the only sign he gave of any emotion.

"Ask him, my son," said the Khan, after a searching look, "if he has anything to say for himself. Ask him in his own tongue. We would not destroy him unheard."

"I did not intend to speak," said Moro Trimmul in reply to Fazil's question, "for I am in hands which know no mercy, and I need none. All I ask of you is to let this girl go; she is a poor Murli who was faithful to me. As for me, I have done all I had to do, and my mission is ended."

"Enough!" cried the Khan, "he confesses. The girl can go; we do not war upon women. But what shall we do with him?"

"Let him die, father," said Fazil, solemnly. "He

was contriving more evil than you know of. Let him die."

"It cannot be yet, my son," said the Khan. "We have much to learn from him. Take him away, and put irons on him. He must be sent to the King and judged at Bijapur."

3. *Tara goes to a new home.*

Fazil rode down the hill to take the sad news to Tara. She was sitting on the edge of the litter, her face buried in her knees. She did not look up till the young man was close to her; when she did, her eyes were so full of misery and dread that Fazil could scarcely bear to look on her.

"May God support you, as I tell you of all your misery," he said, in a voice full of pity. "Yesterday there were a father, a mother, another wife, and yourself, in a happy home. Now three are gone, and you are alone."

She clutched at her throat, as if she were choking.

"Dead?" she whispered. "All dead! O Holy Mother, why is this?"

"Yes," he said gently, "so it has pleased God. Your father was killed fighting in the temple; and in the confusion afterwards, robbers attacked the house, and your mother and the other also died."

"Is it true?" she asked, staring at him with those great scared eyes.

"I swear by the dead it is true," replied Fazil, sadly. "And now you have no relatives, and nowhere to go. My mother and sister are with us; come to them. Zaina will be a sister to you. Come with us. O lady, trust me. I am a stranger to you, but God threw me in your path to save you."

"Yes, you saved me" she said. "Who are you?"

"I am Fazil Khan, son of Afzal Khan, of Bijapur."

"Ah! sir," said Tara, "I am sorely bewildered now; and my heart is dried up. But I will trust you. Take me to your mother. Afterwards I can go to Wai, where my mother had relatives."

"Sher Khan," cried Fazil, "take this lady to the camp at Shulapur. Take twenty men with you. Carry her safely to Lurli Begum's tent. Fear not, lady!" he added, turning to Tara; "you will be Sher Khan's daughter till you are with my sister and mother." Then, mounting his horse, he rode rapidly up the ravine to rejoin his father.

Tara followed his figure with her eyes, and her heart went with them. Then Sher Khan rode up, and a moment afterwards she felt the litter taken up and carried forward at a rapid pace, while the kind old soldier rode at her side and the horsemen spread themselves round her to screen as well as protect her.

As Fazil ate a hasty meal, he told his father what he had done, and the old Khan gave his approval. "Poor girl, poor girl," he said, as he heard Tara's story; "and she is young, you say. Alas, alas! to be so soon a widow . . . Ah, Pahar Singh," he added, as the chief entered the room suddenly and saluted them; "are your people ready? We go on to Shulapur."

"I have come to bid you farewell," said the chief. "I have done my work for you for the present. My duty is not with the army, but on the marches."

"Yes," said the Khan, who in truth dreaded rather than desired Pahar Singh's company, and that of his lawless freebooters; "you are better in your own country, and I have already weakened the force too much at Naldrug to withdraw you."

"Then we may go, Khan?"

"Certainly; you are honourably dismissed with thanks, and I will mention your services as they deserve when I write to the King."

So Pahar Singh and his men rode back to Itga; and Afzal Khan and his company went on to Shulapur.

CHAPTER XVII.

TARA FINDS AND LOSES A NEW HOME.

1. *Lurli's new daughter.*

That evening Sher Khan's company arrived at the camp at Shulapur, and Tara was put in charge of the old nurse, Gulab. The poor girl was so exhausted with her grief, the exciting events of the previous night, and her rapid journey, that she fainted when she got inside the tent; but she soon recovered under the kind and tender care of Zaina and her mother. Both wondered at her beauty, pitied her misery and were drawn to her gentle nature. Very gently they comforted her, until she found relief in weeping.

"Thank God for it," said Lurli as she saw her tears; "she will be better for this; the worst is past; let her weep. May the blessing of God be upon you," she added to Tara. "Fear not; you have come to those who will be to you what you have now lost."

When Afzal Khan and Fazil arrived later in the evening, Tara was peacefully sleeping. Her future fate was discussed in full family council. What could they do with a Brahman orphan, who was by the laws of war a captive and a slave? The Khan was for sending her to the royal harem; but he was strongly opposed by his son and wife and daughter.

"If she is a captive at all, she is my captive," said Fazil, firmly, "so according to law, I can release her, ransom her, or keep her as I will. She has relatives at Wai, where we are going, and with your permission, father, she can stay with us till then."

Happily the Khan was in a good humour. So at last he gave in.

"Well, boy," he said to Fazil, "let her stay and welcome."

Afzal Khan's army, now organized in all respects,

set forward on its march. A few miles only were traversed daily, and it would require a month or more before they could reach Wai. Sometimes a house was found for the ladies in a village or town near which the forces encamped; but more frequently they were in the Khan's tents, which were much pleasanter. The two girls became close friends; and the lady Lurli and Zaina were never tired of hearing from the lips of the beautiful girl the simple story of her life, her widowhood, and her strange rescue.

Was Tara happy? Yes; when she thought of what her fate must have been had she not been rescued from Moro Trimmul. She knew not then of the further escape from the royal harem which Fazil had secured; but as it was, gratitude to him had already become the main feeling of her life. Of her parents' death she had no doubt whatever now. The other members of the family would have claimed the property and cast her off. Widow and priestess combined, she would have been helpless, and now she was at least safe. She was grateful, therefore, and, for the most part, happy too.

But often she wept bitterly when she thought of her home; and the glistening eyes of the goddess seemed to her imagination to follow her, sleeping and waking, with a reproachful look of desertion. In these moments Tara endured bitter grief; but ever at hand were the gentle remonstrances of her new mother and sister, and to them also were joined those of her deliverer.

2. *Vyas Shastri comes to life.*

Two priests had seen Vyas Shastri fall in the fight at the temple; and after it was over found him still breathing, but quite insensible. They dared not take him to his house, as the town was still full of disturbance; so with the help of some other priests they carried him under cover of the darkness to a neighbouring village. For hours his friends had watched him lying there unconscious, fearing he would die; and their hearts were glad when at last he opened his eyes and spoke. He

was still weak from loss of blood ; but they knew now that he would live. Soon after he fell into a refreshing sleep, and when the next morning came his mind was clear, and he at once asked for Ananda and Tara and Radha.

The friendly priests had been so anxious about the Shastri that they had scarcely missed the women of his family. They now sent a man into Tuljapur, but he returned with the news that the Shastri's house was empty. At last Janú Naik was found and when he learnt that the Shastri was alive, at once set out to fetch Ananda and Radha from Afzinga, where they were hidden. The following day they came, accompanied by the faithful Janú.

In a passion of mingled fear and thankfulness, they cast themselves beside the low bed, weeping. The Shastri was too weak to speak ; he could only lift up his hand gently, as if to bless and welcome them, while a faint smile of gratitude shone on his pale face.

For a little while, as they sat silently beside him attending to his wants, they did not, strange to say, miss Tara. But Ananda's mind suddenly misgave her. Her husband had fallen into a peaceful sleep ; so she silently left the room with Radha, her heart full of fear. When they learnt that Tara was missing, they turned sick at heart. A nameless terror seized them ; for they thought she was dead.

Several days passed before they received any news. Then Janu Nâik came, and told them how Tara had been carried off by Moro Trimmul and rescued by a young Mussulman nobleman. This he had learnt from the Ramosis. The treachery of Moro Trimmul, and the fact that Tara was a captive among the Muhammadans, filled them with horror. It was piteous to see the mother and her sister-wife prostrated under this misery and the state of their husband.

At last, one evening, a poor Brahman of Shulapur came to the house with good tidings. Induced by the reward offered by the Shastri's friends, he had gone to the camp, and found out that in Afzal Khan's family there was a beautiful Brahman girl called Tara ; her

people, he was told, had been killed, and she was being taken to her relatives at Wai. She was treated as an honoured guest and one of the family ; and was at least safe from Moro Trimmul, who was a prisoner kept in close confinement.

Vyas Shastri's mind was at once made up. As soon as he was able to travel they would all go to Wai to find Tara.

3. *Moro Trimmul's cunning.*

Afzal Khan had decided that Moro Trimmul should be sent to Bijapur for trial ; but he wanted to find out from him as much as he could about Sivaji's plans before he let him go. When asked to reveal the intentions of his master, Moro's answer was always the same, namely, that the Prince desired only the recognition of his rights, and that when he heard for certain of the march of the Bijapur army, he would be sure to send ambassadors to explain what had happened. At last it was agreed that if ambassadors from Sivaji did arrive within a few days, Moro Trimmul was to be confronted with them ; otherwise he was to be sent back to Bijapur to be dealt with as a traitor. The fact is Moro Trimmul was a clever man and exercised over Afzal Khan the power of a stronger mind over a weaker. His cool contempt for death, his certainty that Sivaji would beg for terms, and his willingness to help if he did, overcame the Khan's suspicions. Further the Khan was inclined to believe Moro's ingenious explanation of his attempt to carry off Tara. He said that her father had asked him to take her away to Wai and make her a priestess in a temple there because she had become jealous of the Shastri's new wife, Moro's sister.

A few days after the army left Shulapur, the envoys from the Rajah arrived in the camp and brought Sivaji's submission, and begged Afzal Khan to go to Pratapgad and enjoy the Rajah's hospitality and discuss matters there with him in a friendly way. The Khan was inclined to believe Sivaji's message, and at once despatched Balwant Rao as his envoy to Sivaji.

He also set Moro Trimmul free. What was the use of keeping Sivaji's irresponsible agent a prisoner, when his real ambassadors had come and declared their master's intention of throwing himself on the King's mercy!

Moro Trimmul's first act was to seek Gunga, and he soon found her, for after she had been allowed to go free at Tuljapur she had followed the army. Very soon they were again discussing plans for separating Tara from her new protectors, and carrying her away again.

Meanwhile Tara was leading a pleasant life. The progress of the army was slow; and there was little change in the daily life—the early march, the halt for the day, the household occupations, and then the pleasant talk with Zaina and Lurli. Two different worlds, as it were, were thus brought together. What did the simple Brahman girl know of the grandeur of Muhammadan nobles? Brought up as she had been, she could never have dreamt of knowing their families as her friends. Now, how different! They had respected her honour, and they also respected her faith so that she was able to take her food and observe her religious duties without breaking caste. She soon became a favourite with the whole family, and even the servants loved her for her gentle and kind ways.

Gradually as the time passed on, the memory of the old house began to fade, the forms of father and mother became dim and shadowy as belonging to the past. The old temple occupations, the preparation for daily duty, were being supplanted by other things.

At last, one day, when Wai was only a few stages away, Zaina told her what they all wished. What was it? That Tara should become Fazil Khan's wife.

"They say," argued Zaina, "that the Emperors of Delhi sought brides from among the Rajputs, and considered them as honourable and as noble as themselves; and you are a Brahman, Tara, far purer and nobler than they. But no matter; you are our own Tara, whom God has sent to us. Let it be as we all will."

Can we wonder that Tara at last consented? Believing her parents were dead, knowing what her lot

would be as a Hindu widow among distant and unsympathetic relatives, finding herself surrounded by so much affection and tender care in this kind family, and already admiring her noble young deliverer, she yielded to their wishes.

4. *Caught again.*

But Tara's enemy had not been idle. Day and night, he and Gunga, in various disguises, had watched about the Khan's tents, and had tried to get speech of the servants. He dared not come openly, except to the Khan's Darbar, where he heard nothing. He was nearly hopeless of success, when one day he heard casually that an evening march was determined upon. All the force was not to move; but some only with the Khan, for the sake of convenience of supplies and water. It was a short stage—only four or five miles, and the Khan's tents were to go before the force. He and his family were to remain in a village for the night, and several houses had been cleared for him. Thus much had Gunga picked up, and for once fortune seemed to favour their designs.

Tara travelled in a litter, which was closed, and carried with those of Lurli and Zaina. As it grew dark Moro Trimmul with a small body of horsemen which he had detached from the Envoy's and kept about his own person, followed Tara's litter at a distance. As they neared the place where they were to stop for the night, he observed that Tara's palankin was the last, and he cleverly pushed his horsemen between it and the others, in a narrow lane, in which litters, horsemen, and soldiers were much crowded together. Then he stopped his men, pretending there was obstruction in front; and so the litters of Lurli and Zaina, surrounded by footguards as usual, went on, never missing the one behind.

Moro Trimmul was exultant. At the next turn in the road, his own servants, who had been instructed beforehand, went to the bearers of Tara's litter, pretending to have been seeking them, and bade them come

on rapidly. The men followed blindly ; they knew they were to go to a village, and here was one ; and, pressing forward, they presently reached a house to which they were directed.

"Put down the palankin. *Gosha ! Gosha ! Murdana ! Murdana !*" was cried by several voices ; and a screen of cloth being stretched, as usual, from the palankin to the entrance of the court, and the door of the litter opened, Tara came out from it unsuspectingly. Then the door was instantly closed behind her, a thick shawl was thrown round her head which almost stifled her, and she felt herself taken up by powerful arms, and carried rapidly onwards. She struggled violently, but a voice she knew but too well hissed into her ear through the shawl, "Be quiet or I will kill you" ; and for a moment she lost consciousness.

She revived, however, as the shawl was pushed roughly from her head and the cool air reached her face ; and in another moment she was set down in a small room dimly lit by a small lamp.

"You have powerful friends, Tara," said Moro Trimmul with a scornful sneer, as he looked at her in triumph, "but they cannot help you now."

"The holy Murli of the goddess forgot her faith and her vow among the Mussulmans," said Gunga, coming out from a dark corner of the room with a mock gesture of reverence ; "and the Mother has sent me to bring you back to her service."

Tara stood dumb with terror at finding herself again in the power of her enemy. But just as Moro Trimmul was about to speak again, she heard footsteps passing the house, and at once she began to scream for help. Moro sprang to her side and seized her roughly. "Gunga !" he cried ; "the shawl. Quick, girl—lest she be heard without. Quick ! Bar the outer door."

It was too late. Several persons, among whom was an elderly Brahman of dignified appearance attended by armed retainers, came up the steps hurriedly and entered the room crying, "Who are you ? What murder is this you are doing ?"

Gunga fled ; and Moro found himself surrounded

and tightly held by several men. As a man ran in with a lighted torch, the leader of the party recognised Moro Trimmul and ordered his retainers to release him. As they did so, Tara threw herself on her knees before the old Brahman, crying piteously for protection.

"Peace," he said to her, "peace, my daughter; no one shall harm you. Who are you? What has happened?"

"I am the unhappy daughter of Vyas Shastri of Tuljapur, who was murdered, and I am an orphan," cried she, sobbing. "O, defend me from this wicked man."

"Moro Trimmul," said the old man sternly, "how often have you been warned! What new wickedness is this?"

"She is a Murli," he replied, sulkily, "and has done dishonour to the Mother by living in the Mussulman camp. It was from them I have rescued her, and would have taken her to Wai, but she resisted."

"Take me away," cried Tara, weeping. "I have done nothing wrong. Save me from this man."

"Come," said the man, who was Govind Narayan, the principal Envoy of the Rajah Sivaji, and a Brahman of wealth and high station in the country. "I am well known, and I know and honoured your father, and grieve for his death. Come with me, and you shall go on with my people to Wai. As for you, Moro Trimmul," he continued, turning to him, "I reserve judgment until I make inquiries from this girl. I bid you, however, beware. The Maharaja will be wroth when he hears of this. I take this girl as my daughter, and she is safe against you. Beware."

So saying, and giving his arm for Tara to lean on, he led her out, and once more placed her in the litter, which was taken up and carried forward rapidly.

The fury of Moro Trimmul when he found himself baffled a second time was fearful to see. He raged and stormed and cursed, while Gunga in sheer terror crouched in a corner. Seeing her at last all his anger turned against her. "Fool!" he cried, "you have lost her to me again!" and drawing a knife he sprang

at her in his passion. Gunga escaped him, and ran shrieking into the street, and from that day disappeared from his life.

After a long journey they came to the village where Govind Narayan's women-folk were staying, and she was introduced to his wife Amba Bai, a stout matronly woman with a grave but kindly face, and Padma Bai, his sister, a thin sour woman who, as a widow, was clad in coarse white garments and had her head shaved. When she had heard her sad story and learnt she was the daughter of so learned a Pandit as Vyas Shastri, Amba Bai welcomed Tara in a kind and motherly way; but the coarse face and small spiteful eyes of the widow wore an expression of dislike and scorn which boded no good to Tara in the future. After some discussion, Govind Narayan and his wife decided that the best thing to do was to keep Tara under their protection until they reached Wai, where they might be able to hand her over to the safe-keeping of her relatives.

It had been a weary time to Zaina, Lurli and the Khan's household, and even the Khan sat up far into the night, speaking of Tara. No one had slept. As for Fazil, he rode round the country for miles, all through the night, seeking Tara, but in vain.

The following day (Fazil was still absent) Govind Narayan spoke to Afzal Khan after the afternoon Darbar, and told him what had happened.

"We cannot allow her, Khan," he said kindly, "to remain with you, much as you have respected her faith. It would be a scandal to Brahmans, if the daughter of Vyas Shastri were the guest even of Afzal Khan and his household. We—that is, my wife and myself—have charged ourselves with her for the present, and her people, the Durpeys of Wai, are rich and devout,—they will receive and protect her."

Afzal Khan remonstrated as far as possible. Tara had grown to be a familiar and beautiful object to him; but he felt the Brahman was right, and that he must not connect her name with his son's.

"At least she is safe and in honourable keeping,"

said Fazil, when he had heard all, "and for the rest as God wills."

"*Amin! Amin!*" sighed Zaina, but she was not comforted, nor was Fazil.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THE MOUNTAIN RAT."

1. *The Fire is on the Hills.*

Westward from the great mountain plateau of Mahableshwar in the Western Ghâts rises the huge mountain of Pratapgad which was the capital and favourite stronghold of Sivaji Bhonslé. The top of the mountain furnished space for dwelling-places and magazines, while springs of pure water sufficed for the use of a large body of men, by which it could be easily defended. At various periods of time walls and towers had been added to the natural defences of the place, as well as strong gateways on the only approach to the summit—a rugged pathway which could hardly be called a road.

A few days after Afzal Khan's attack on Tuljapur, the village below Pratapgad, the road from it to the fort above, and the fort itself, were crowded with men coming from all the country round to see the "Kutha," a sacred play, of which their Rajah had given notice. These "Kuthas" were the means of assembling his men without attracting suspicion; but his followers well knew that the most exciting enterprises immediately followed them. On this occasion the people concluded that something important was about to happen, and hoped that at last "the fire would light the hills."

Sivaji had heard from Bijapur of the death of the Wazir, the discovery of some of his own correspondence by the King, and the acceptance by Afzal Khan of the gage to undertake a campaign against him with a picked army. He had not heard since, nor had Tannaji Malusré arrived; but Sivaji knew that Afzal Khan was no laggard in war, and that he must prepare himself to meet the danger which threatened.

All the morning Sivaji had sat in his humble hall of audience, surrounded by some of his tried friends, and some Brahman priests and scribes. Their chief had a kind word of greeting for every one. Many saw that his features were clouded with care; but the news from the capital concerned no one, and the "Kutha" to come off that night would, they knew, prove the usual prelude of active service.

No one who had once seen the Maharaja ever forgot him. Though it was now mild, if not sad, in expression, his face had been seen by most there in wild moods of excitement, in war or in actual hand-to-hand combats; while the belief that he was an incarnation of divinity added awe to the respect and love which all bore him.

The morning ceremony was at last over and, somewhat wearied by it, Sivaji rose and passed into his private apartments.

In the evening he descended the mountain on foot, attended by his bodyguard, to the spot which had been cleared for the "Kutha." This was a glen, in the midst of which was a level space green with grass. At its upper end was the Rajah's seat—a platform of earth covered with carpets from the fort, upon which the "Gaddi," or seat of state, was placed. The place for the players was in the centre of the open space; and all round on sloping banks the spectators crowded in their thousands to watch the play. The whole scene was lit up by huge torches, for it was now growing dark.

Before the Rajah took his seat he saluted the assembly, turning to each side of it with his hand raised to his head, and all rose to welcome him with shouts and clapping of hands. Then all sat down.

After recitations from the sacred books, and processions round the altar and chanting of hymns, the play began which was to occupy three nights. Hour after hour the vast audience listened and watched as scenes from the Mahabarat and the Ramayan were presented, relieved by merry farces and the singing of mountain ballads.

It was near midnight, perhaps, when a single horseman suddenly turned the corner of the mound, and rode slowly up the centre. His noble horse seemed jaded and weary, for it moved languidly, yet, when it saw the lights and people, raised its head and gave a shrill and prolonged neigh.

The rider's face was tied up, as is customary with Mahratta horsemen; but as he advanced he unwound the scarf about it, and the stern features and flashing eyes of Tannaji Malusré appeared to all. For an instant he was not recognized; but some one who saw him cried "Tannaji!" and the name spread from mouth to mouth, rising into a roar of welcome among the people, as the rider struggled on through the crowd which now pressed about him. Dismounting near the altar, Tannaji gave his horse to a servant; and Sivaji and all about him rose to meet him. His sudden arrival alone, and at that time of night, boded strange tidings; and while his arms were yet around his friend, Sivaji anxiously asked what news he had brought.

"Of sorrow, yet of joy, my prince," replied Malusré, disengaging himself. "I heard the news at Jutt, and I made a vow that I would not sit or rest till I had told it to you and to the people.—Rise, all of you!" he shouted to the assembly in that voice which they had often heard above the wildest din of battle, "and listen to my words!"

They rose to a man instantly, and with a rustling sound: after which there was perfect silence. Every face of those thousands was turned towards the speaker. Every form, from the highest tiers to the lowest, bent forward in eager expectation of what should follow.

"Listen," he continued, "O beloved prince and people: we have fallen upon evil days, for the goddess, our Mother, has been insulted, and her temple at Tuljapur desecrated. Yes," he continued, lifting up his hand to stay the cry which was about to break out, "Afzal Khan has done violence to Tulja Mata, plundered her temple and slain Brahmans; and now the altar there, and the Mother, are my witness that I have told this grief to you truly!"

Then burst forth a wild roar of rage from the crowd. Some wept, others shrieked and beat their mouths, or cast their turbans on the ground, but at a motion of their prince's hand they were once more silent and listening with rapt attention.

"O friends! O people! Shall the Mother's temples be desolate? Not while Sivaji Bhonslé lives, and you live! Better we died in honour than lived to be pointed at as cowards, while she is unrevenged! Listen," he continued, as he took up the sword lying at his feet, "This, you all know, is named after the Mother. See!" and he drew it slowly from the scabbard, "she hath a bright and lovely face, but it must be dimmed in blood. So I swear, and so you will answer to my cry—*Har Har, Mahadeo!*"

As he spoke he flung the scabbard passionately on the ground, and waved the glittering blade high in the air. Already was men's blood fiercely stirred by his words, and the Rajah's action rendered them almost uncontrollable. Every man in that assembly drew and waved his sword as his chieftain had done; and the light flashing from polished weapons, and the frantic shouts of the old war-cry, as men swayed to and fro, still more excited the rude soldiery—"Har, Har, Mahadeo!"

But there was silence at last. It seemed as if the men expected to be led there and then against their hereditary foes. That, however, was not to be yet. During the clamour, Malusré had told his chieftain that Afzal Khan's army was on the march, and that means must be taken to oppose it. So the Rajah once again spoke out in those clear ringing tones which were heard by all.

"Not now, my people," he cried—"not now. If we have sworn to revenge the Mother, she will wait her time, and herself deliver this arrogant foe into our hands. Then, O my friends, shall she drink blood, and be satisfied to the full. So fear not: if this news is terrible, it is yet good; so let us rejoice that we have the more cause to be united in avenging it. And now sit down once more; and play on, O players! Who

shall say that Sivaji Bhonslé and his people were scared from their 'Kutha' by Afzal Khan?"

The people settled down again, and the play proceeded; while Sivaji heard from his friend Malusré the tale of the Wazir's death, and the sack of Tuljapur.

It was more than ever evident to Sivaji that to attempt to oppose Afzal Khan in the field with the men about him would be madness; but he might be drawn on, by specious promises of submission, into wilds where his cavalry and artillery would be useless, and in those jungles the men then present would be ample against ten thousand Muhammadan infantry.

Then it was determined to send to Afzal Khan's camp those agents with whose arrival there we are already acquainted.

2. *Punto Gopinath.*

The arrival of an envoy from the Muhammadan General was an important event to the Rajah Sivaji. It was his object to disarm all suspicion while he made his arrangements for the blow he had to strike. When therefore the Brahman Punto Gopinath arrived, there were no troops visible. He was received with great respect and ceremony, but with no military display. And when he met Sivaji in audience he wondered how this insignificant little man, dressed in the plainest clothes, could be the saviour of the Hindu faith and defy the forces of Bijapur. At the conclusion of the interview the Rajah said good-humouredly,

"You can see for yourself that we have made no preparations for defence or resistance. If the Khan will accept our rude hospitality instead of making war on us, it will be a happy thing for all."

"Indeed, my prince," returned the Brahman, "we who are in Bijapur well know how much Afzal Khan helped your father, when he was imprisoned in the old Sultan's time. He is a humane and generous man, and has no personal enmity against you, my lord."

"We will at least put it to the proof," replied Sivaji.

Soon after the Rajah closed the audience and passed into the inner chamber, where he sat as before, looking

out over the rugged mountain side and the pass, now glowing in the rich tints of an afternoon sun. If he could only get Afzal Khan into his power, and hold him sure as a hostage, he might make his own terms. Would the Brahman aid him in this? A word from him and the matter was secure. If he could only be persuaded to write, a swift messenger might be sent to the camp, with one of his own officers to guide on the army. Once the troops entered the defiles they were at his mercy. There was no escape—the whole must surrender or be slain. But he well knew the old Afghan would not agree to dishonour, and to separate him from his force was therefore his chief anxiety.

Late that night, muffled in a coarse blanket, and accompanied only by a few attendants, the Rajah descended from the fort by a steep and rugged pathway, and passed rapidly on to the house where the envoy was staying.

"Wait in the outer court, friends," said the Rajah to his attendants. "This must be done between us alone."

Punto Gopinath was sitting in the inner verandah of the second court of the house, reading. He looked up as a servant entered and said, "There is one here from the Rajah, who would speak with you."

"Admit him," was the reply; and Sivaji could see as he entered, that the Brahman drew towards him a short, heavy dagger-sword and placed it so that the hilt lay close to his right hand. "Be seated, friend," said the envoy, "and tell your business. What does Sivaji Bhonslé desire of me?"

The Rajah's face was tied up with a handkerchief, which partly concealed his mouth and changed the tone of his voice, and he had passed his hand, covered with white wood-ashes, across his nose, eyes, and forehead, as he entered, which altered the expression of his eyes. It was evident that he was not recognized.

"Sivaji Bhonslé desires the prosperity and advancement of Brahmans," replied the Rajah. "He wishes to see them as powerful as in the days of the ancients, and in this desire you can assist."

"I assist ! How, friend ? I, a Brahman, am a receiver, not a giver,—and am only a servant," he added with a sigh.

"It need not be so, Pandit. The fame of your learning has gone before you, and the Maharaja desires your friendship and welfare. I am sent to tell you this."

"What can I do ?" said the envoy restlessly. "What would he have me to do ? and who are you to speak thus to me ?"

"No matter who I am—I am authorized to speak," replied Sivaji. "Look, here is his ring as my authority. 'Is he a Brahman,' the Rajah said, 'and come with Muslim followers to sit in my Darbar ? Alas, alas ! that such should be. This is indeed the age of debasement.'"

The Brahman writhed in his seat. "There are many besides me," he said, "who serve the people of Islam."

"Who serve the enemies of our faith," cried the Rajah, "the men who killed Brahmans in the temple of Tulja Mata. O shame,—shame !"

"I would fling my service at the feet of Afzal Khan, and even of the Sultan himself, could I but serve with Hindus as I desire to serve," exclaimed the Brahman.

"The opportunity might be found, friend," answered the Rajah, "if it were truly desired ; but proof of fidelity would be required,—would it be given ? What is the Maharaja's desire ? Do you know it ?"

"I guess it," said the Brahman, "for I am not easily deceived by appearances, and I understood his looks to-day, if I mistake not. Could I only speak with him ! Can you take me to him ?"

"Do you know me, friend ?" returned the Rajah, as he untied the handkerchief which concealed his face, and with it wiped the white ashes from his eyes and forehead—"do you know me ? It is thus that I salute a holy Brahman," and he rose and made a lowly reverence, touching the feet of the envoy respectfully.

The man strove to return it, but was prevented. "It cannot be," continued Sivaji ; "here you are a Brahman and I a Sudra. Let it be as I wish. It is for you to receive the honour, not I."

"What would you have me do, Maharaja?" replied the envoy, now trembling much. "I have done evil in helping the enemies of our faith, and would now undo it if possible."

"I have had many things in my mind, Pandit," replied the Rajah, "and the Mother sends perplexing thoughts; but one thing is clear to me—she must be avenged."

"Hark!" said Gopinath, after a pause, "come nearer. If I bring Afzal Khan and his men within the defiles, will it content you? If I do this, what will you do for me?"

"I have prepared for that already,—a Jahgir, a high office,—double your present pay, whatever it be,—an ensign of rank, and—my friendship."

"Give me time to write," said the man, trembling under conviction of his own treachery and the excess of temptation to which he was exposed; "I will give you the letter to-morrow."

"Impossible, Pandit," replied the Rajah: "the messengers are ready without, and they will bear what must be written to the Khan."

"Who will take the letter?"

"My Brahman secretary; he and some horsemen are now ready."

"But to the Khan himself there must be no harm done," said the Pandit. "To him and his son I owe many kindnesses: for the rest, as you will. Keep the family as hostages."

"As guests yonder," replied the Rajah, "he will be safe, he and his. Shall I send for writing materials? Krishnaji! Sit there," he continued, as his attendant entered; "see that what is written is plain."

And the envoy wrote in the Persian character, in which he was a proficient, and which the other secretary understood:—

"I have seen the Rajah, his fort, and his people, and there is nothing to apprehend. They are all beneath notice but in order to settle everything perfectly, and to inspire terror, my lord should advance with all the force, according to the plan devised here which the honour one of the

Rajah's secretaries, will explain personally, and which would be tedious to write. In a strictly private interview, which will be arranged, the Rajah Sivaji will throw himself at the feet of the ambassador of the king of kings, and receive the pardon which he desires. More would be beyond respect."

"It is enough," said Sivaji, when this writing was explained to him—"it will have the desired effect. Take this letter, Krishnaji, and set out for the camp at once."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TRAGEDY OF PRATAPGAD.

1. *The Night before.*

Punto Gopinath's letter was received in a few days by Afzal Khan. There was nothing in it that could in any degree disturb his mind or awaken suspicion. He felt, perhaps, a little disappointed that what promised to be an exciting adventure should have such a tame conclusion; but he was glad that a valuable ally was to be secured to the royal house he served without bloodshed.

Day after day the army advanced under the messenger's guidance by easy but continuous stages.

They had now entered the Rajah's own jurisdiction, and were treated more as honoured guests than as an invading army. Supplies were provided at every stage, forage was abundant, difficult places in the roads were found cleared for the artillery, and the people met them with goodwill and courtesy, which was as pleasant as unexpected. Any idea of resistance was out of the question. The usual village guards were all that was seen of the Rajah's forces. In short, all the obstructions and dangers which had appeared so great at a distance had passed away; and as the Khan led his troops more and more deeply into the mountainous district, he could not but feel that if they had been opposed in those rugged defiles, the struggle would have been difficult as well as desperate. The enemy would have had a stronger country to retreat upon, and one more easily defended, while, in proportion, the advance to him would have been beset with grave peril.

Meanwhile, the programme of a meeting had been arranged by the agents between the Khan and Sivaji. Both parties had put forward points of etiquette, which could hardly be overcome. The Rajah, as a prince,

could not visit the Khan first, nor could Afzal Khan, as the representative of royalty, visit the Rajah; but they could both meet at some place between the royal camp and the Rajah's fort. The place of meeting was fixed on a level spot at some little distance up the mountain of Pratapgad, where the Rajah, the messenger said, had already prepared a pavilion, which would be fitted up for the occasion. If the Khan pleased, he might bring a thousand or fifteen hundred of the best horse to witness the ceremony from below; but no troops were to be present at the conference. The Rajah and the Khan were to meet alone, each attended by a single armed follower.

So the army reached its final stage near the village of Javli, a few miles distant from the fort; and the last preparations were made that night by both parties.

The Khan's tents were pitched under some large trees near a stream. Beneath the shade of these Zaina and Fazil had sat most of the day. The loss of Tara's society pressed heavily on them both. All they heard was that she was well and among her people. She was to remain among them at Wai; and as the army returned, she should see Lurli Khanum and Zaina once more, and then bid them farewell. It was a dreary prospect for Fazil, and apparently a hopeless one; and he and Zaina had again and again discussed plans for rescuing her, but with little result.

"If only Moro Trimmul could be found, and brought to account," Fazil said, grinding his teeth, "it would go hard with him." But he had disappeared. The envoys in camp declared he had gone to Pratapgad to clear himself to the Rajah Sivaji, but that he was not there now. He had been sent on some special mission to a distance where no one seemed to know.

Fazil, however, was not satisfied, and determined to get news of Tara direct for himself. He found the hunchback, Lakhshman, who was now his faithful servant, and the boy Ashraf, and sent them secretly to Wai. When he had seen them off the *mullah* was chanting the *Azân*, and Fazil passed out into the usual

place of prayer, which was numerous attended. After its close, his father, and all who were to stay to dinner, assembled for the repast, which was served immediately. There was no forward movement of tents that night; and the guests sat till a late hour discussing the probable events of the morrow, and the possibility of an early counter-march, at least as far as Wai, where the open country was preferable to their present confined situation among the mountains.

At the same time in his chamber in the fort above, Sivaji and Malusré were sitting together, but were silent, for the Rajah's mind was troubled.

"Have you prepared all, Tannaji?" he said at last, looking up.

"Master," he replied, "everything is ready. By midnight, or a little later, Moro Trimmul and the rest of the veterans will be in the woods near Javli around the camp. Every position has been marked out, and will be silently taken up. Nothing can escape out of that plain, and they will await the signal of the five guns from the fort."

"Moro swears," he continued, after a pause, "that he will take the sister of the young Khan, in revenge for his rescue of the Tuljapur Murli."

"He dare not," said Sivaji quickly. "I have heard that girl was an honoured guest in Alzal Khan's family; the Brahman says she was. No, he dare not touch her; and I have warned him not to do so."

Malusré shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps," he said; "God knows! but Moro says otherwise. Let it pass; it is not our business; but he will be none the less active to get the whole family into his power."

"There are five thousand of my best Mavlis sleeping in the thickets east of the fort-gate. They will close in behind the Bijapur people as they pass, and when we hear the horn, I think few will escape. O, the blind confidence of these Bijapur fools!" cried the Rajah, laughing, as he lifted up his hands. "They have neither eyes nor ears, or they would have guessed we are not as we seem. But the goddess Mother has blinded and deafened them."

2. *Afzal Khan meets his death.*

The morning broke calm and beautiful. Long before the highest peaks of the mountains blushed under the rosy light of sunrise, the Khan, Fazil and Zaina had risen and performed their morning prayer.

As an attendant brought the Khan the usual mail shirt he wore, and the mail-cap with its bright steel chains, over which his turban was usually tied when fully armed, he laughingly declined both. "They will be very hot and uncomfortable," he said, "and we are not going to fight. No, give me a muslin dress," and he went out among the men.

Fazil followed, fully armed and ready for riding. He had begged to be allowed to accompany his father as his attendant: but Afzal Khan, saying he was too young for political discussions with wily Mahrattas, had chosen one of his officers, Said Bandu. Fazil was to be in command of the escort.

The escort awaited them in the camp, and the spirited horses of fifteen hundred gallant cavaliers were neighing and tossing their heads as Afzal Khan, Fazil, and Said Bandu rode up. "Forward!" cried the Khan cheerily; and as the kettledrums beat a march, the several officers saluted their commander, and, wheeling up their men, led them by the road pointed out by the Brahmans and guides in the direction of Pratapgad.

At that time, single men, who looked like shepherds tending sheep, and who were standing on crests of the hills, or crouching so as not to be seen, passed a signal that the Khan and his party had set out.

As the Khan's retinue neared the town, parties of armed men, apparently stationed by the roadside to salute him as he passed, closed up in rear of the escort; and others, moving parallel to them in the thickets, joined with them unseen. Quickly, too, men with axes felled large trees, which were thrown down so as to cross the road behind them, and interlaced their branches so as to be utterly impassable for horsemen. All these preparations went on in both places, silently and methodically.

At the gate of the town the Khan dismounted from his horse, and entered his palankin. Before he did so, however, he embraced his son, and bade him be careful of the men, and that no one entered the town or gave offence. He could see, looking up, the thatched pavilion on the little level shoulder of the mountain, and pointed to it cheerfully. "It is not far to go," he said to Said Bandu, "I may as well walk with these good friends," and he pointed to the Brahmans who attended him. But Fazil would not allow it, nor the officer either. "You must go in state," they said, "as the representative of the King ought to do," and he then took his seat in the litter.

"May God protect you, father!" said Fazil, as he bent his head into the palankin, when the bearers took it up; "come back happily, and do not delay!"

"If God wills!" said the Khan smilingly, "fear not, I shall not delay, and you can watch me up yonder." So he went on, the officer's hand leaning upon the edge of the litter as he walked by its side.

On through the town, from the terraced houses of which crowds of women looked down on the little procession, and men, mostly unarmed, or unremarkable in any case, saluted them, or regarded them with clownish curiosity. No one could see that the court of every house behind was filled with armed men thirsting for blood, and awaiting the signal to attack.

Leaving the town, they climbed up the steep mountain road, until at last they reached the level space where the meeting was to take place. The palankin was set down, and the Khan got out, talking to his companion, who was panting with the exertion of the steep climb. Awaiting him was his own agent, Gopinath, and two Brahmans. No one else was there except a man who seemed to be a labourer, who was tying up a rough mat to the side of the pavilion to keep out the wind and the sun.

"Is he not here, Puntaji?" cried the Khan to Gopinath, who saluted him respectfully.

"No, my lord, not yet. Ah! look," he continued,

as he turned towards the pass, "there are two men on the path, and that one, the smaller, is he."

The men coming down appeared to hesitate, and waved their hands as if warning off some one.

"It is the bearers," said one of the Brahmans. "The Rajah is timid, and fears the crowd he sees."

The Khan laughed. "Good," he said to the men. "Go away; sit down yonder in the shade. You will be called when I want you;" and as they got up and retired, the two men advanced slowly and cautiously down the pathway.

Afzal Khan went forward a few paces as Sivaji and Malusré came up. "You are welcome, Rajah Sahib. Embrace me," he said to Sivaji. "Let there be no doubt between us;" and he stretched forth his arms in the usual manner.

Sivaji stooped to the embrace, and as the Khan's arms were laid upon his shoulders, and he was thus unprotected, struck a sharp deadly tiger's-claw dagger deeply into his bowels, seconding the blow with one from another dagger which he had concealed in his left hand.

Afzal Khan reeled and staggered under the deadly wounds. "Dog!" he cried, pressing one hand to the wound, while he drew the sword he wore with the other, and endeavoured to attack the Rajah. Alas! what use now were those feeble blows against concealed armour? Faint and sick, the Khan reeled hither and thither, striking vainly against the Rajah, who, with the terrible sword now in his hand, and shouting the national cry of "*Har, Har, Mahadeo!*" rained blow upon blow on his defenceless enemy. It was an unequal strife, soon finished. Falling heavily, Afzal Khan died almost as he reached the earth.

Meanwhile, Malusré had attacked Said Bandu with all his force and skill, but the officer was a good swordsman, and for a short time held his ground. Neither spoke, except in muttered curses, as blows were struck; but Tannaji Malusré had no equal in his weapon, and as he cried to the Rajah, who was advancing to his aid, to keep back, the Said, distracted by the assault of

another enemy, received his death-blow, and sank to the ground.

"*Jai Kali!*" shouted both. "Now, blow loud and shrill, Gunnu, for your life," continued the Rajah, "and you shall have a collar of gold."

The man who had appeared to be a labourer seized his horn, which had been concealed in the grass, and blew a long note, with a shrill quivering flourish at the close, which resounded through the air and echoed among the mountains; and thrice repeated the signal.

Then a great puff of smoke, followed by a report which thundered through the valley, burst from above. Those who were looking from the fort, and the Rajah himself, who ran to the edge of the knoll, saw the wreaths of fire which burst from the thickets about the plain where the Muhammadan cavalry stood, and a sharp irregular crash of shots came up from below. Hundreds died at every volley, and there were writhing, struggling masses of horses and men on the plain; and some men, still mounted, strove to pierce the barriers which had been made on every side, crowded upon each other, and falling fast, were in utter confusion.

Moro Trimmul had taken up his position overnight on a hill overlooking the main camp of Afzal Khan's army. A few boughs placed together formed a screen on a high knoll, which commanded a view of the camp beneath, and of the summit of the fort whence his signal was to come. He sat there watching, and observed the force below, careless, without a guard, without weapons—the men sitting idly, wandering about, or cooking, as it might be. Every moment seemed interminable; and the eyes of those who looked with him were strained towards the fort.

"One," he cried at last, as the first puff of bright smoke burst from the bastion—"two—three—four—five! Enough. It is complete, my friends. Now, cry '*Har, Har, Mahadeo!*' and upon them. Spare no one! Come, friends, let us sack the Khan's tents first, where I have some work of my own to do."

"Beware," said an elderly officer, who stood near him—"beware, Moro Pandit, of the master, if you

disobey him in this. He will suffer no insult to the women."

"Bah !" cried Moro Trimmul, "I am a Brahman, and he dare not interfere with me. Come !"

In the camp there was but a short resistance. On the one hand, the desperate valour of the mountain soldiery, the certainty of plunder, revenge for Tuljapur, and the example of Moro Trimmul and other leaders ; and on the other, the helpless, disorganized, bewildered mass before them, rendered the assault irresistible. The first attacking bodies were succeeded by mass upon mass of fresh assailants from all quarters, and these successive tides of men surged resistlessly across the camp, overwhelming all.

But when Moro Trimmul and his party reached the Khan's tents, they found no one. The tracks of ponies, where they had descended the bank were, however, visible, and were taken up by his followers, who dashed forward like bloodhounds on a scent. "Away after them, Kakrey !" cried the Brahman to a subordinate officer. "You are a better tracker than I. Bring them to me. Then," he added to himself, "Fazil Khan, we will see who wins the game—you or I."

3. *A ride for life.*

Fazil Khan had watched the progress of his father up the mountain with intense interest, and had seen him arrive at the place of meeting above with his attendant. As the two men from above appeared, he saw his father advance to meet them, and embrace one. It was but for a moment and the fatal result was at once apparent.

With a cry of horror Fazil saw his father reel and fall, rise again, as his sword flashed in the air, and with the Said maintain the unequal combat we have already described. No sound reached those below ; they could only see the flashing of the weapons in the sun, and the struggle of the combatants. Involuntarily Fazil urged on his horse. Alas ! of what avail now ! Others had been watching as well as he ; and the blast of the

horn, which rose shrill and quivering as the Khan fell, was answered by volleys of matchlock shots from the woods around. The gates of the town were shut, and the walls and bastions manned as thickly as men could stand on them, whose fire on the horsemen below was hot and deadly.

The effect of the surprise upon the helpless cavaliers need not be detailed. Panic-stricken, and hemmed in on every side, they rode hither and thither, vainly seeking places of egress through the woods, or by the way they came, and were shot down in scores either where they stood, or as they gathered in groups and charged hither and thither in the vain attempt to reach a foe. Among these, Fazil Khan, with Balwant Rao and some others, had kept together; and, in the emergency, Balwant's clear perception, not only of the danger, but of the best means out of it, saved his young master.

Being a Mahratta, he was familiar with the country, and he knew there was one possible way of escape.

"We need not be martyrs yet, Meah," he said. "Now, set your teeth, my sons," he shouted to the men around, "and follow me!"

He and Fazil spurred forward their horses, followed by about one hundred desperate men. As they approached what seemed a pathless wood, Fazil's heart failed him for a moment. "You are wrong, Balwant Rao," he cried. "We cannot get through this—let us turn"

"Madman!" exclaimed the other, seizing the bridle of his horse. "I swear I am right! Follow me, my children," he shouted, looking back, while he again urged his horse to its utmost speed; "we are near now."

He was right. A portion of the jungle jutted out beyond the rest, and made a slight shoulder, as it were, behind which was the path. As they turned the corner, they saw a body of foot-soldiers drawn up across it; but before these could raise their matchlocks to fire, the impetuous horsemen were among them, trampling some down, and hewing fiercely at others with their long swords. The attack was irresistible, and, the first line of men forced, they encountered no

others. Straggling shots were fired at them from the sides of the mountain, but without effect; and after riding nearly a mile down the glade at the same speed, the pathway turned into the main road and they heard the din of the fight die away behind them. Of the fifteen hundred gallant cavaliers who had ridden that morning from the camp at Javli, they were the only survivors.

They rode on until from a rising ground which overlooked the camp they could see the ruin which Moro Trimmul's forces had caused. It was clear that the surprise had been as complete as at the town above.

Casting his eyes round in sickening dread—indeed, in almost hopeless despair—the young Khan looked towards the tents where he had left his sister and Lurli. The tents were standing, but the outer enclosure walls were thrown down, and a crowd of followers and soldiers were apparently struggling together for the plunder of what they contained. The place was apart from the field itself, and Fazil pointed to it; he could not speak.

The men with him had had no time for thought. From the moment the Khan had died at Pratapgad till they drew rein on the hill over the camp, they had ridden for life. But the worst was now evident; and what they had hoped to find was gone. The conviction that all their companions were dead at once fell upon their hearts; and Balwant Rao, and many another rough veteran, burst into passionate weeping.

Fazil appeared calm, but it was the calm of desperation and of misery. "Why do you weep, friends?" he said. "They are all dead; why should we live? Death is better than dishonour! Come and see—*Bismilla!*"—and he turned his horse's head in the direction of the tents.

"*Bismilla!*" shouted the men, as, with teeth hard set for a last struggle in life, they rode a mad race to their old camp. Hewing their way through a crowd of plunderers, they saw that the tents were empty; and in the bed of the rivulet which screened them from observation, they drew rein. In his misery Fazil would

have dismounted and sought death on foot, but Balwant Rao saw his intention, and prevented it.

"No, no, Meah," he said roughly; "you are our master now; and as the gods have enabled me to save you once to-day, so we will all try again. If they you sought have been taken, they are in honourable safety with the Rajah: if they are dead, there is no help but in submission to God's will."

A shout caused Fazil to look round. He saw some persons running towards the party who had come out from the thick jungle on the other side of the stream. They were grooms who had hidden themselves.

One of them clasped Fazil's knees. "They are safe," he cried; "Meah, they are gone this way with the hunchback and Ashraf, who would not let us follow lest we should be seen. They went down the river; and see! here are their tracks. Come!"

For hours, led by the grooms, who were good trackers, they followed the pony tracks. Late in the afternoon they saw a small group of people sitting near a large banyan tree, on the bank of a mountain stream.

At a little distance, too, from them, sat a few men armed with matchlocks, who were apparently guarding the rest.

Fazil and the scouts approached, cautiously leading his horse. The first greeting was a rough one from the guards, who raised their guns to fire; but the next, a frantic cry of welcome from the hunchback and Ashraf, who ran forward and prostrated themselves before him.

"O Meah, they are safe—they are safe!" cried Lakhshman, rising first. "Come and see," he cried, bursting into tears; "and the gods have sent you."

Yes, they were safe—Lurli and Zaina. A rude bower of leafy branches had been hastily made, with a screen of boughs twisted into stakes in front. Fazil entered the enclosure—and the two desolate women, whose utter despair nothing as yet had soothed or alleviated, fell upon his neck and wept aloud.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SATI.

I. *A fearful Discovery.*

Meanwhile Vyas Shastri, Ananda, and Radha were pressing on as fast as the nature of their travelling would allow.

At first their stages were necessarily short, with frequent halts; but as they proceeded, they had increased the daily distance; and the news of the action at Pratapgad made them more and more anxious to reach Wai, and learn Tara's fate. All attempts to trace her on the road were fruitless. The army had passed; and in the confusion of its progress, individuals could not be traced or distinguished.

At the last stage before Wai, they found the village where they rested in much excitement. It was understood that a Sati would take place in the town the next day; and though it was not known who the person was, it was evident that people from all the country round would attend it.

As they came near to Wai, the people on the road were all talking of the coming Sati, and the crowd seemed specially interested in the preparations being made on the bank of the river. In the middle of a broad bed of sand near the stream, some men were already piling logs of wood into a square mass, and pouring oil on them; fixing tall poles at the sides, and hanging garlands of flowers and wreaths of leaves on them. The pile was large, and would soon be completed for the sacrifice.

Vyas Shastri rode to the spot, and inquired of the men—they were Brahman priests—for whom the preparations were being made. They did not know, they said. When the Sati came there to die, she would be seen. Meanwhile she was at Vishnu Pandit's house,

and he might go and see her, and worship her, as others were doing.

At Vishnu Pandit's house! The very place to which he was going! Certainly, then, he should see the woman, whoever she might be, that was to be burned.

When they had passed through the crowded streets of the town, they came to the Pandit's house and found him standing at the door of the outer court opening into the street, across which some men were tying garlands of green leaves and flowers. Seeing the Shastri coming, he came to him, and, helping him to dismount, embraced him warmly.

"I received your note," he said; "but I have had no time to reply to it. I have no room for you, old friend, as I have the Sati in my house; but my neighbour the Josi gives you one of the courts of his house. Take the ladies there," he added to an attendant, as they arrived. "But do you, Vyas Shastri, come with me. I must speak with you alone. Ah, we had mourned you as dead—yet how wonderful it is that you are here, and to-day, too! Come, I have much to say to you that is strange—most strange."

The Shastri followed him through the inner court into a room, and the Pandit shut the door.

"Vyas Shastri," he said, looking at him intently as they sat down, and speaking with great concern and grief in his voice. "O friend! O dear old friend! I have dark news for you to-day. Alas! and woe to me that I have to tell it! Have you a daughter named Tara?"

"I have come to seek her—what of her?" replied the Shastri, sickening with dread—"what of her?"

"She was a priestess of Tulja Mata at Tuljapur, was she not?" asked the Pandit.

"She was so, friend, and the Mussulmans carried her off. But they spared her honour! O, say they spared her honour!" he exclaimed piteously, and stretching forth his hands.

"She was an honoured guest with them, friend, and would that—O, how shall I say the rest?" he

thought,—“how explain this misery? Alas, what evil fate has sent him to-day!”

“You are keeping something from me,” said the Shastri, striving to be calm. “If—if Tara—my daughter— What is it, O friend? we have suffered much suspense, much anxiety—for her sake we have taken this weary journey; and we hoped to have found her here among friends, perhaps with you. What have you to say of her? Did they not give her up, as we heard they would? Have—they——”

“Yes she is here,” returned the Pandit hesitatingly, and turning away his head in a vain attempt to repress his tears. “She—she— is a widow, is she not?” he asked.

Then the truth flashed upon the wretched father with fearful rapidity. That crowd of people: that hideous pile of logs: the preparations and rejoicing were for her death—for Tara’s, and after all he was too late to save her!

“It *cannot* be, Vishnu Pandit,” he said at last in a low husky voice; “it cannot be! Who has wrought this cruelty upon her? Who has done it? Of her own act and will it could not have been; but if the council have dared to—to——”

“She thought you dead—you, her mother, and your new wife,” replied the Pandit, interrupting him. “She was suffering hopeless persecution and insult, and in the temple she stood before the Mother’s image, and declared herself Sati before the Brahmans. Could we recall the words? I was present. Had it been my own daughter I would have been thankful. O Shastri! it was her glory!”

Vyas Shastri could not reply. “Let me see her and hear it from her own lips,” was all he could utter at all intelligibly.

“Certainly, if you will,” replied the Pandit; “she is ready to go even now, but the hour is not come. And yet, Vyas Shastri, beware; would it not be better she believed you all dead, and so died happily looking for you, than, seeing you alive, be shaken in her determination?”

The Shastri groaned, and his breath came in broken gasps. He was trembling violently. "I—I—must see her," he said; "let her decide;" and, unable to stand, he again sat down.

"If the Mother whom she serves has spoken to her, it is well—she will go to her. My child! O my child!" cried the miserable man in his agony. "O Mother, what has she done for this to come to her—she, so pure, to need the sacrifice of fire! O Tulja Mata, was it needed? Come, I am ready now," he continued, after a pause. "Do not delay."

The Pandit passed his arm round his friend to support him, and, leading him to a door in the farther end of the room, opened it. A small court lay between the place where they stood and a larger one beyond, the door of which was open, and showed a crowd of people, mostly women, struggling to approach some object beyond. All had garlands of flowers in their hands, and vessels wherewith to pour libations. Suddenly there was a shrill piercing scream.

"What can have happened?" cried the Pandit, hastening on. "Come quickly."

Vyas Shastri felt instinctively that Ananda had seen Tara, and he rapidly followed his friend. As he entered the next court, he saw at a glance all he yearned for—all that he most dreaded to see.

A bower of trellis-work had been fitted up in the large apartment of the Pandit's house which was raised slightly from the ground, and it was covered with heavy garlands of green leaves and flowers, as though for a bridal. In the narrow doorway of this bower stood a slight female figure, richly dressed in a bright crimson silk dress, striving to put away the arm of a Brahman priest,—who was preventing her from stepping forth,—and struggling with him. The face was full of horror and misery, and the eyes flashing with excitement and despair. Before her, without, lay an elderly woman senseless on the ground, supported by a girl. Tara, Ananda, Radha! Darting forward past the Pandit, pushing aside some women, Vyas Shastri leaped upon

the basement of the room, and, dragging away the Brahman priest, stood by his child.

"Tara, Tara!" gasped the unhappy man, "Tara, come forth—come; I, your father, call you! O my child, do not delay; come, we will go away—far away, to the Mother——"

To the Mother! Perhaps if he had not said this, Tara would have been unable to repress those last fearful yearnings for life which now tore her heart; but the echo fell on her own spirit heavily. To the Mother!

"You cannot move hence," said the Brahman priest. "Cry Jai Tulja! Jai Kali! O Tara! you will not now deny the Mother!—all else is dead to you."

No, she could not deny her now—she would not. With that strange light in her eyes Tara's spirit was rallied by the priest's words. "Jai Tulja Mata!" she cried, stretching her arms into the air; "I am true, O Mother! I am true; and even these shall not keep me from thee now!"

Tara had conquered. He had heard her doom from her own lips, and, believing in the inspiration which prompted them, the father's head fell on his bosom; then the men, feeling his frame relax, let him go, and he fell prostrate before his child and worshipped her.

They had removed Ananda into an inner room, and her senses had rallied under the care paid to her. As he rose with a despairing gesture, and turned away from his child, the Shastri sought Ananda. "There is no hope," he said, "wife—none. It is her own act, and the Mother takes her. She is doomed, and I saw it in her eyes. It is enough that we have come to see it; she is already gone far beyond us, and we dare not recall her."

He closed the door, and within were Radha, Ananda, and himself. What he said to them,—how he consoled them, no one ever knew: but after a while they came forth, bathed and purified themselves, and went and sat silently near their daughter.

Later in the day Vishnu Pandit explained to Vyas Shastri why Tara had been driven to declare herself

Sati. Govind Rao, the envoy, and his wife, Amba Bai, had been kind to her; but from his sister, the widow Padma Bai, Tara had to endure insult and ill-usage, from which Amba Bai was unable to save her. Few, indeed, in the house could face the bitterness of Padma's tongue or the virulence of her spite. Even her brother feared her. To Padma Bai, Tara, with her girlish beauty, her long hair, her jewels and her fine dresses, was no widow and no priestess, but a shameless impostor.

"Is that the figure of a widow and a priestess," she would cry shrilly as Tara stood trembling before her,—"that thing with a golden belt, and necklaces and ear-rings, and silken clothes?"

Life became so unbearable to Tara that at last, in desperation, she declared herself "Sati" before the shrine of the goddess she had served. Death seemed to the poor girl better than life under such conditions. Her father and mother were dead (as she thought); Govind Rao, with all his kindness, was powerless to protect her; and her newly-made Muslim friends were lost to her for ever. Moreover she imagined that all her troubles were the sign of the terrible Tulja Mata's displeasure, whose service she had deserted, and that only her death would appease her wrath.

2. *Fazil Khan to the rescue.*

Fazil Khan and his sister and Lurli sat talking long into the night. At first the two women could do little but weep; but as they became calmer they explained to Fazil how they had escaped. Lakhshman, the hunch-back, and the boy Ashraf had started off for Wai as Fazil had told them to do; but they had not gone far before they were caught by some of Sivaji's men who were hiding in the jungle. From their conversation they had learnt of the treacherous attack the Rajah had prepared for the next day. They managed to escape from their captors the next morning and, instead of going on to Wai, had rushed back to the camp and had just been in time to get the ladies away before the attack began.

Three days afterwards, Fazil and his party, who had been joined by other stragglers on foot and on horseback, were lying during the day in a place of concealment in the depth of the jungle near Wai, Zaina and her mother having been sent with an escort to the neighbouring town of Kurrar.

A bright stream sparkled past the tree; grass was abundant on the hill-sides, and a liberal price for grain had induced some villagers near to supply their wants for a few days. Every day the hunchback and the boy Ashraf, disguising themselves as mendicants, had sung ballads in the town of Wai, in order to gain information of passing events.

They were lying concealed in this hiding-place when, in the afternoon of the third day, the hunchback broke in upon Fazil and some others sitting together. "Bid them all go away," he cried excitedly; "I have strange news, Meah, for you,—for your ear only."

The men rose and went to a distance. •

"Meah," said the man, in a low voice, "Tara the Murli is alive, but they are going to burn her to-morrow; and I saw them taking wood to the river-side to make the pile. They say the goddess came to her and told her to be a Sati, and they are going to make a great show of her to the people. The people do not know her name, but I knew her; it is Tara. O Meah, you will not let the Brahmans do this!"

"By Alla and the Prophet, no!" cried the young man, starting to his feet. "Do you know the place?"

"Yes, I know the house," said Lakhshman. "I marked it well before I left."

"Where is Balwant Rao? Call him."

When he joined Fazil, all was told him; and the three men consulted long and earnestly as to how the girl might be rescued.

After discussing the subject in every way, there seemed no chance of success but in an effort to carry her off from the pile itself. The attempt might succeed or fail; but the men who would undertake it were at least desperate, and to abandon the girl to her fate without endeavouring to rescue her was not to be

thought of. In any case, they must leave their hiding-place on the morrow, or starve.

Tara! Her name aroused a thousand sweet memories. The day after the interview with the Rajah, she was to have been demanded as a subject of their King; and, in the Rajah's apparently submissive mood, Fazil had anticipated no refusal. What had happened to place her in the situation in which she was, he could not guess; but Balwant Rao and Lakhshman guessed that she was the victim of Brahman intrigues excited by Moro Trimmul, and rejoiced in the prospect of frustrating his intentions. Finally, the whole project was explained to the men; and in their hearty response, and in the excitement of a new and desperate action, the young Khan lay down that night, and, for the first time since the slaughter, slept soundly.

3. *Snatched from the fire.*

The day had come, and Tara was carried in an open litter though the crowded streets of the town, as in a triumphal procession, to die. The people pressed around her shouting, and companies of Brahmans, bare-headed, joined the procession, chanting the hymns of death. She reached the pile by the river, now covered with fluttering flags and thousands of garlands of flowers.

Tara looked at the pile; but there was a strange ecstasy glowing in her eyes. Sometimes she cast up her eyes with a strange bright smile, and nodded as if she were saying, "I come, I come." Again she looked round her dreamily. The roar of the people's voices, the clash of cymbals, the shrill screams of the pipes and horns, the hoarse braying of trumpets, and the continuous beating of deep-toned drums, were around her, drowning the sound of words and the bitter sobs and low shrieks of her mother and Radha at her side. Her father's spirit seemed to have risen to the needs of the occasion, for he stood near her joining the solemn chant which blended with, and softened, the rude music.

As she stood, the Brahmans worshipped her, and poured libations before her and on her feet, touched her forehead with sacred colour, and put fresh garlands over her neck. Then the last procession was formed, in which she would walk round the pile thrice, and ascend it, as her last act. Now, and before she had to take off her ornaments, she turned her full gaze on it, and they thought, who were watching her, that she seemed to comprehend its purpose. Face to face with death so horrible, so near, the girl seemed to shiver and gasp suddenly, and sank down swooning.

A Brahman, who had followed just behind her litter in the procession, quickly stepped forward and raised her up. It was Moro Trimmul. Ever since he had heard that Tara had declared herself Sati, he had been filled with remorse and despair. Though it was torture to him, he could not keep away, but had come, in his misery, to see her die. As he raised her up, the wild idea flashed into his mind that even at that last moment he would rescue her from that horrible death.

"Tara, Tara," he whispered madly in her ear, "save yourself, even now—even now. I will take you away and save you. I can do it. Come—come!"

The words and his hot breath on her cheek roused the girl more completely than anything else could have done. She did not speak, but she arose, strong and defiant, and, shaking him off, pushed him away so violently from her, that he staggered and fell backwards.

For some time past a body of horsemen, with their faces tied up after the fashion of Mahratta cavaliers, the housings of their horses weather-stained and their arms rusty and unpolished, had moved about the bed of the river and the bank beyond, and as the procession advanced to the pile, pressed on nearer to the crowd. It might be a hundred men or more; and the leader, who was a Mahratta, spoke cheerfully to the people who addressed him, and told them of his pursuit of the Mussulmans, and the raid they had made into the Bijapur country, from which they

were only now returning in time to see the show before they went home to the fort.

Our old friend Balwant Rao had become spokesman and leader; and the hunchback rode with him, and bandied words with the bystanders freely, but in good humour. With them, too, was Fazil Khan, who joined heartily in the rough jokes which were passing—many at his own expense—of ragged clothes, rusty arms, and gaunt features. And thus the band pressed on to the very skirts of the crowd, as if to see the Sati, but actually to take up the position necessary for their adventure.

Balwant Rao had seen Sati rites before, and he knew Tara would alight from the litter when she arrived at the pile. As she did so—as the litter was carried aside, and before the procession around the pile was formed—they had determined to ride in upon the crowd and bear her away. They knew that every horseman in the town would be present there, unarmed and on foot, and that miles would be passed by them ere pursuit could be made.

“Be ready, Meah,” said Balwant Rao, in a low voice. “See, they are clearing a space around the pile for her to walk. How beautiful she is! ‘*Jai Kali! Jai Tulja Mata!*’” he shouted with the crowd. Then turning to the hunchback, he bade him go round the rear of the party and see they all kept together. “As one man, Lakhshman, when they hear our shout, let them follow.”

So they advanced nearer and nearer, and the crowd on foot, unable to resist the pressure of the horses, gave way before them. The sword of every man was loosened in its sheath, and a few of the rear men, who had matchlocks with lighted matches slung over their backs, unslung them on their saddlebows, ready for use. If any one had noticed Fazil Khan, they would have seen him smoothing a cushion, as it were, of cloths upon the pommel of his saddle, while he wakened his horse with an occasional touch of his leg, and kept him excited for a sudden rush.

They saw Tara alight. Fazil was not a stone's

throw distant, and perhaps she might see him, but she did not. He was not in her thoughts now; the agony of giving him up had passed from her in the despair of life long ago. They saw her suddenly sink down, and Moro Trimmul stoop to raise her up.

"*Bismilla! Fatteh-i-nabi!*" cried the young Khan, as, pressing his horse's flanks, the animal bounded forward. "*Bismilla, brothers, Ya Alla! Ya Alla!*"

"*Ya Alla! Ya Alla!*" shouted the rest behind, as they too gave their horses the rein, and all dashed forward furiously.

Some men with poles and sticks struck at Fazil, Balwant and Lakhshman, as they came on first, but none there had arms. It was as Tara, watching the effect of her effort against Moro Trimmul, stood apart, with flashing eyes and heaving bosom, that the hoarse shout of the horsemen fell upon her ear. She looked at them for a moment; she saw people go down before them, trampled, shrieking, under foot, and the weapons flashing in the sunlight. Then two men stopped for an instant—she was between them: both stooped towards her at the same moment, and one threw himself off his horse, and lifted her to the other's saddle.

As it was done, a man sprang at Fazil's horse's bridle with a frantic curse, caught it, and jerked it violently. The noble beast, urged on—for Fazil saw the danger—partly reared, but was held down by the bridle.

"I never kill Brahmans," muttered Lakhshman through his teeth, "but you are a devil;" and he struck at Moro Trimmul's bare neck with all his force. As the wretched man sank to the earth under the terrible wound, the hunchback sprang to his horse, clambered upon it like a cat, and flourishing his bloody sword, though he struck no one, rode by Fazil's side onwards, unharmed.

No one opposed them; the action was too sudden and too desperate. The crowd, also, was not so thick towards the river, and gave way before them; and, dashing through the shallow ford, the horses throwing up the bright water in a cloud of sparkling drops, they

galloped up the bank, and even then, were beyond pursuit. A few shots were fired after them but with no effect.

It was long ere the party drew rein, and no one spoke. Tara lay easily, supported on the cushion by Fazil's arms, and he watched anxiously for signs of returning consciousness. It came at last, as he felt her cling to him, and she looked up to his face, as they crossed a small streamlet leisurely, with a pleading look which could not be mistaken.

"Ah, fear not," he said; "fear not, beloved! You are safe now. Did you think, Tara, I would leave you to die that frightful death without an effort?"

The beauteous eyes opened again, and closed softly as the tears welled from them.

That night, another pile was lighted by the river-side, and a corpse, never removed from the spot where it fell, was burned upon it; but the pile of the Sati remained, grim and black, and the garlands of flowers had withered in the next day's sun ere it was dismantled.

There were a thousand rumours current in the town for some days as to who could have done so bold a deed, but no one guessed the truth. Had Moro Trimmul lived, he could have told; but he had never spoken after the hunchback's sturdy death-blow. So the people believed that some of the starving Bijapur cavalry, wandering about, had determined to attack the people collected for the Sati, and plunder them of what they could; and that the rich ornaments which the Sati herself had worn attracted their attention, and they had carried her off for them.

That same evening Fazil's troop of horsemen, dusty, travel-stained and weary, slowly approached the town of Kurrar. Zaina and her mother had already preceded him according to arrangement to the house of a respectable Muhammadan merchant of the town. When they reached the house, he was outside the door—a pleasant looking man, dressed in flowing Arab robes and a green turban. He saluted Fazil courteously, and said—

"Who are you?"

"Fazil, the son of Afzal Khan?" was the reply.

"O, great joy! O thanks to God!" cried the man, lifting up his hands. "Embrace me, and come in quickly. Your mother and sister are safe within."

"Then she will live! they will save her!" cried the young man excitedly. "They will save her! Where are they?"

"Within, in the zenana," replied the merchant. "And she?" and he pointed to the litter.

"No matter, sir," said Fazil, advancing; "all will be told you hereafter. She is much to them; but she is grievously shaken, and we lose time. She cannot speak, and is burning with fever."

"Ah, is it so? Then let her be carried in," and he clapped his hands. "Take that litter within at once," he said to the women who came; "then see to the lady who is in it."

Four stout women took up the litter, carried it into the inner court, and set it down.

Lurli and Zaina were lying in an inner room, the door of which was open, and whence the entrance to the court could be seen. "What can they be bringing in?" said Lurli, as she saw the end of the strange litter entering the door. "A man following, too! Begone!" she screamed violently, hiding her face under the sheet; "begone! this place is private."

"Mother," cried Fazil, who heard her voice but did not see her; "it is I; and here is Tara. Come, O Zaina; where are you? Come quickly to her."

It was far in the night ere consciousness returned to Tara. "No matter, God hath sent her again to us," said Gulab, whose ideas were always of the most practical description; "she is ours now, and we will bathe her." And some Brahman women, who lived hard by, came and assisted. So, ere morning broke, Tara was lying on Lurli's bosom sobbing gently, and, with her loving arms wound round her recovered treasure, Zaina was sobbing too.

For some weeks Tara lay dangerously ill from the shock she had undergone; but she gradually recovered, and when she was strong enough to be moved, they all

travelled by easy stages home to Bijapur. There, some time after, a double wedding was celebrated, and brother and sister were married on one day. Zaina became the wife of Khawas Khan, and Fazil Khan began that happy wedded life with Tara, the Hindu girl he had twice rescued, that did not end until both were laid side by side in the mausoleum that stands to this day.



NOTES.

Chapter I.

Puranas : the sacred books which teach religion and worship to the Hindu peoples of India. They were first written in Sanskrit.

Durga, Kall, Bhavani : names of the goddess, wife of Siva the Destroyer.

Dekhan : derived from the word meaning South and signifying all that tableland lying south of the Narbada River.

In the year 1657 : at this time Aurangzeb was engaged at Agra in fratricidal strife and in achieving the deposition of his father the Emperor Shahjehan ; Cromwell in England was at the end of his masterful career ; and Job Charnock, the founder of Calcutta, was at the beginning of his.

The Vedas : the sacred books of the early Aryan Hindus who settled in India about 2,000 years before the Christian era. They are written in the oldest form of Sanskrit and are the subject of Brahminical study.

Benares, etc. : the sacred cities of the Hindus. Benares is on the Ganges ; Gya is where Buddha preached ; and Madura and Conjevaram are in the south. Nassuk or Nasik is near Bombay.

Basant festival : at the season of spring, consisting of the months of Chaitra and Vaishakh, March to May.

Guru : a Hindu religious teacher.

Chapter II.

Saree : the ordinary garb of a Hindu woman.

A Turki woman : one who goes veiled in public, a Mohamadan woman.

Gita : a song.

According to thy word : the author has couched this beautiful prayer in well-known biblical language ; cf. the Nunc Dimittis.

Palki : A litter or palankin.

Murli : a priestess of a Hindu temple.

Chapter III.

Ironically : with bitter (not genial) humour.

Wal : a well-known centre of Brahmin culture on the Western Ghats south of Bombay, and the favourite residence of Tilak.

The Moghuls and the Mahrattas : Rajah Sivaji was the Mahratta leader of the rebellions against the rule of Shahjehan and Aurangzeb, the Moghul Emperors at Agra, and of the Muhammadan Emperors of the Adil Shah dynasty at Bijapur in the Dekhan. He is the founder of the Mahratta power in India, and he brought about the Hindu revival throughout the land which ultimately destroyed the Muhammadan supremacy.

Vows of pilgrimage : cf. the "Palmer's" of Scott's novels who are also under a vow to visit the holy places of their faith.

We have found a treasure, a jewel : notice how the simple metaphor makes the meaning quite clear—a good wife is like a jewel.

A merry measure : a joyous tune.

Lakshmi : or Sri, the goddess of beauty and good fortune, the wife of Vishnu.

Chapter IV.

A lucky day : an auspicious day for the wedding.

Ahmednagar : this Muhammadan Kingdom was annexed to the Empire by Shahjehan in 1636.

Ballads : the simple songs of the people.

'The fire was on the hills' : a figurative way of saying that a general rising had broken out.

Wazir : the Prime Minister.

Naw Ratri : the nine nights.

Dussera : this is the holiday given by Vishnu to the Kshatriya or warrior caste. It is the grand holiday in Rajput and Mahratta states.

Fakir : a religious devotee : commonly used also as a name for a beggar.

Chapter V.

The Ramayana : the epic of Rama of Oudh who married Sita, describing their wanderings in the forest and in the Deccan. Lakshman was the half-brother of Rama. A Hindu version of this epic, written by Tulsi Das, the greatest Hindu poet of the Middle Ages, has become the sacred book of the peoples in Northern India. In it Rama is the king-god, perfect in virtue and goodness.

Rajputs : the pride and the glory of India. They are most probably the descendants of the Kshatriyas—the warrior-caste—of the olden times.

Jemadar : an officer in an Indian Cavalry regiment.

Nulla : in the rains a river, in the hot weather a dry ditch.

Like a drenched scarecrow : a picturesque simile, adding vividness to the description.

Camp language : Urdu, the Lingua Franca of India, understood in every part. Introduced by Akbar's general, Todar Mal, it is a mixture of the Persian spoken by the ruling race and the Hindi talked by the camp-followers.

Emperor Aurangzeb : see note on Chapter III.

Patel : the name given to the headman of a village in South India.

Kanarese is spoken in its greatest purity in the Mysore country, and also among the southern Mahrattas and in part of Madras. It is somewhat similar to Telegu.

Protection of a local Chieftain : the same idea is found in Scott's description of the Highland chieftains of Scotland, e.g. in *Waverley*.

Chapter VI.

A large horned owl : the bird of evil omen.

Shabash : Bravo! Well done!

Hanuman : the general of the king of the forest-dwellers, who assisted Rama.

Golkonda : a Muhammadan kingdom which, like its neighbour Bijapur, was annexed by Aurangzeb

Chapter VII.

By its rings : the sound—the voice, as it were—of a gun. Readers of the *Last of the Mohicans* will recall that Hawk-eye the scout could distinguish one gun from another by its ring.

True to the King's salt : loyalty to the king you serve.

The Persian poets : the study of Persian poetry would be popular under Moghul rule; Akbar was a patron of all the arts.

We are the testers of gold : an apt metaphor. As a money-changer can distinguish false coin from true, so can we tell the false man from the true.

Alamgir : Shahjehan gave his son Aurangzeb a sword which had this name inscribed upon it,—‘world conqueror,’—and Aurangzeb took it for his title.

Krishna : the eighth incarnation of Vishnu.

Ali Adil Shah : Aurangzeb finally moved in person against Bijapur which capitulated in 1686. Ali Adil Shah was imprisoned at Daulatabad and died about 1700.

Chapter VIII.

Kaffirs : a name given by the Arabs of East Africa to all pagan natives of Africa. The word in Arabic means an unbeliever or infidel, and it is used in this sense here.

Madad Khanas : drink shops.

Among the tamarind trees : cf. 'the haunted temple beneath a banyan tree' in chapter V, or these lines:—

Where o'er some shrine in ruin laid,
The peepul spreads its haunted shade.

Daulatabad : the ancient Deoghiri in the Dekhan, place of imprisonment of Ali Adil Shah, and burial place in 1707 of the last great Moghul, Aurangzeb.

Dangerous quarters : localities which may be visited at night only at the risk of one's life.

The beads : praying beads, cf. the Christian rosary.

Yogi : an ascetic.

Amin ! Amin : Amen ! May it be so !

Chapter IX.

Sanyasi : or Hermit, the final stage for him who wished to live a perfect life ; one who has given up the world and lives on fruit and roots in the forest. Sankara-charya, the Hindu saint and sage, became a Sanyasi and wandered all over India. Under Muhammadan rule the task of preserving the Hindu religion amongst the people was entrusted to the Sanyasis, who could address them in popular dialects.

Rallery : speaking with contemptuous humour, 'chaffing him', in colloquial English.

Sent you after your ancestors : an example of Euphemism ; a pleasant way of making a statement that would otherwise hurt and be crude:— 'I ought to have killed you.'

The mysteries of religion.

Courtly Persian phrases : ornate, polished and hyperbolical phrases of compliment, of which the Lala gives a sample on p. 75. Spanish is the language of Europe that lends itself most readily to courtly compliment.

Wax-cloth : to preserve the contents even against water.

Not à feather : a concrete phrase which adds expressiveness and vigour to the writing. Not even the weight of a feather.

The Lion of the Hill : Pahar Singh himself, of course.

Chapter X.

Dead men tell no tales : a proverbial expression.

Har; har mahadeo : the national war-cry of the Mahrattas
Balwant Rao was a Mahratta.

Out of ganja : sold out, all the stock disposed of.

A gunshot from here : at a distance of a gunshot; cf. 'a stone's throw', 'a biscuit-toss.'

No blood-shedding here, good sirs : the whole scene may be compared to the fight at the Clachan of Aberfoyle, described in Scott's *Rob Roy*.

A novitiate : more usual a 'novice.'

Chapter XI.

Serals : a camping-place.

Even so, father : this is a rather antiquated expression, found in the writings of Scott and Fenimore Cooper. It means 'Just so; exactly what you say.'

Jo hukm : We obey.

My soul eats your words : I am consumed with anxiety and curiosity and personal interest to hear your words. The author is borrowing the imagery of the Orient.

Chapter XII.

Smallest possible compass : to occupy very little space.

Cypher : secret writing. There is a well-known example of a cypher in Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Gold Bug."

Abyssinian : an independent and warlike nation of north-east Africa.

Pir : A saint.

A Holy Said : A Muhammadan who traces his descent from the Prophet.

Gird up your loins : another phrase reminiscent of biblical language.

Muazzin : one who chants the Azan or call to prayer.

His night's potions : his drunkenness of the previous night.

Amulet : a charm-stone.

My son Gopal : his nephew and son-in-law.

His deadly errand : which would result in death and tragedy for many.

Chapter XIII.

Khamosh ! Silence !

Silvery tones : having the qualities of clearness and pleasure-giving.

The Imperial Vice-regent : he will reign almost independently as the Emperor's representative.

Under the infidel : in this case the Hindu Rajah Sivaji.

Din ! Din ! The Faith ! The Faith !

Nursed in war : a most expressive metaphorical phrase. These figures drawn from common life have almost lost their

figurative sense; cf. especially in English the illustrations drawn from sea life.

Nazrs : generally an auspicious offering placed before a king or great person at the first visit.

A knot of men : a group of persons collected together in a common cause. The metaphorical idea is in their being bound closely together by sympathy.

Birra of Pan : leaf of the betel.

The 'Mountain Rat' : i.e. Rajah Sivaji, who plundered the fertile districts and retreated to his hill-fastnesses, such as Pratapgad, among the Western Ghats.

Brooks no listeners : too private to be overheard by anyone else.

Chapter XIV.

Jackals and hyenas : as the temple was old and deserted.

A rough ballad : a song of the people without literary finish. There are many similar in Percy's "Reliques" and other collections, deficient in technique and execution but full of sincerity and true poetry.

When 'the fire is on the hills' : when the rising has taken place.

Chapter XV.

The wardens of the frontier marches : who resemble in many respects the wardens of the Scottish Borders pictured by Sir Walter Scott.

He kept close, like a bear in his den : this is an expressive simile which gives a good idea of Tannaji skulking in his hiding-place, yet dangerous if trespassed on or routed out.

He left some of the bones : a pun.

More Trimmul : whose introduction links up again the different threads of the story : the fortunes of Tara and Fazil Khan now march together.

The litter : a palankin, carried on men's shoulders.

Ravings : his excited speech would appear like a madman's.

The Turks ! i.e. the Muhammadans.

Chapter XVI.

Ah Maharaj : a title given in derision.

I will do that beautifully : as he had done previously with Lala Tulsi Das, vide p. 45.

That crowns our work : similarly Cromwell spoke of 'the crowning mercy.'

Favourite followers : the hunchback Rama was killed in this fight. Maun Singh was mortally wounded in the fighting described in Chapter X.

I swear by the dead : truly and with all reverence, as one speaks and thinks of the dead.

My heart is dried up : with grief, another expressive metaphor. In the same way the heart 'swells with joy.'

Her heart went with him : She was falling in love with the young hero.

On the marches : i.e. on the borders.

Chapter XVII.

Escape from the royal harem : especially as she was a Brahman girl and a priestess of Bhavani.

The Prince : i.e. Rajah Sivaji.

She has done dishonour : as one vowed to the holy mother she should not associate with persons of another faith.

Will be wroth : a rather antiquated form—will be angry.

Charged ourselves with her : assumed the responsibility of her safe-keeping.

Chapter XVIII.

Mahabaleshwar : above Poona on the Western Ghats, now the hot-weather station for Bombay.

Magazines : stores for arms.

No laggard in war : slightly reminiscent of young Lochinvar.

Mahabarata : like the Ramayana an epic or narrative poem of the heroic age. It relates the struggles of the Bharatas, a strong tribe settled near Delhi, and is by far the longest epic poem known. It gathers up numerous old tales, legends and traditions of the Aryans and the aborigines.

Their hereditary foes : the Muhammadans.

Specious promises : i.e. plausible.

Disarm all suspicion : conceal his designs so that no one could suspect him.

The Old Sultan : the Emperor Shahjehan. Sivaji's father was Shaji Bhonsle who took sides with Bijapur against the Moghuls.

Put it to the proof : make the trial.

The defiles : the narrow passes.

Fling my services at the feet : relinquish it whole-heartedly.

Sudra : the fourth caste, composed chiefly of the Dravidian natives of the country, and non-Aryan.

Chapter XIX.

Mullah : preacher and priest.

Counter-march : a return march.

Blow loud and shrill for your life : as if your life depended on it.

Tracker : one able to follow the trail of men or animals.

Set your teeth, my sons : in desperation.

Bismilla ! If God so wills it ! In God's name !

Chapter XX.

Sati : the custom of Sati is said to have been introduced among the Rajputs as so many wives had poisoned their husbands, and it was hoped to put a stop to this unpleasant practice by forcing them to be burnt with their husband's body.

Strange ecstasy : religious fervour and fanaticism.

Housings of their horses : leather and steel trappings.

Rough jokes : largely of a personal nature.

Like a cat : another expressive simile.

Arab robes : the followers of the Prophet came originally from Arabia.

She screamed violently : gives a little touch of humour to relieve the tension and pathos. It coincides with our joy at the reunion.

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